Elder Conservatorium of Music

Faculty of Arts

University of Adelaide

‘Variations on a Theme’ as a Means of Musical Storytelling: Portfolio of Compositions and Exegesis

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

David John Lang

December 2018

Contents

Abstract

This submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide creatively explores the storytelling potential of variation form in instrumental music for concert performance. It consists of a portfolio of seven original compositions and an exegesis.

The musical form of 'variations on a theme' has been used for centuries in works of great dramatic power, yet composers of narrative program music have generally avoided the form, preferring less repetitive, more heterogeneous structures. This project takes insights from narrative theory (literary and musical) to explore an original approach to musical storytelling within the confines of variation form. It is shown how the limitations of variation form can be used to advantage in certain musical narratives by providing structural clarity, singular focus and teleological momentum.

The key aspects of variation form explored here are its monothematicism and its cellular structure. The inherent linearity of variation form is further enhanced in several works by the use of process-driven variations (inspired by minimalist techniques), in which each variation systematically builds upon the previous variation rather than independently referring back to the theme.

This linear approach to form is adapted to simple narrative structures of growth and gradual change in *Teklanika Twilight* (a passacaglia conveying the crescendo of a river), *The Imaginary Waltz* (portraying awkward attempts to dance that gradually fall into step) and *Yukon Sunrise* (growing light illustrated with a simple formula of expansion). Two wind orchestra works demonstrate contrasting roles for the theme: it acts as the subject in the 'hero's quest' narrative of *Going on a Lion Hunt*, and as the hidden object or goal in *Over the hills and far away*. The conflict between a theme and its variations is paralleled with a struggle between order and transgression in *Cocoon*. The major work of the portfolio is a 38-minute piano solo, *Catcher Variations*, which uses a combination of all these approaches.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signed:

Date: 03/12/2019

Acknowledgements

There are so many people who have helped to bring this music to life.

Teklanika Twilight and *Yukon Sunrise* both owe their existence to the 'Composing in the Wilderness' program in Alaska, run as part of the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival, which I attended in July 2016. Thank you Stephen Lias for creating this program, thank you to the Nine Wolves (the other composers) who joined me there, and thank you God for making Alaska so wild and beautiful.

Thank you to everyone who participated in my two PhD recitals – onstage, backstage or in the audience. Nicholas Bennett, Jesse Budel, Andrew Chan, Anna Coleman, Jack de la Lande, Joseph Freer, Jonathan Hall, Tom Helps, Amanda Home, India Hooi, Thalia Huston, Thea Maxwell, Elsabeth Parkinson, Sebastian Phlox, Suyeon Ro, Hugo Selles, Natalie Tate, Jillian Visser, Melanie Walters and Lester Wong were all involved in either performing or workshopping the music for these recitals.

I am very grateful to the musicians of the Adelaide Wind Orchestra for performing and recording three of the pieces in this portfolio. Ben Bersten, Kathleen Cowie, Bryan Griffiths and many others did so much behind the scenes to make this possible.

Ray Thomas is responsible for almost all the recordings, and he went above and beyond expectations in helping me to refine and edit the material. Martin Victory made booking Elder Hall a breeze.

I am grateful for feedback offered on works-in-progress by Bryan Griffiths and Andrew Schultz (*Going on a Lion Hunt*), Luke Dollman and Howard Parkinson (*Yukon Sunrise*), Suzanne Kosowitz and YanYan Smales (*Over the Hills and Far Away*), Alondra Vega-Zaldivar (*Teklanika Twilight*) and by Anne Cawrse, Martin Cheney, Jakub Jankowski, Stephen Lang and Steph Youssef (*Catcher Variations*).

Thank you Charles Bodman Rae, my co-supervisor, for encouraging me to do this PhD in the first place. Thank you Graeme Koehne, my principal supervisor, for convincing me not to give up when I almost lost hope at the first hurdle in August 2015. And thank you Anne Cawrse, for being a kind of unofficial supporting supervisor along the way.

I have not done any of this alone. I owe a massive thank you to my dedicated Composition Prayer Team (Anne & Russell Bartlett, John & Denise Carvosso, Scott

Fenwick & Alison George, Matthew Gray, Eleanor Hebart, Peter & Lynn Lang, Stephen Lang), whom I emailed fortnightly throughout the process. I am also grateful for the support of my Parkside Baptist Church family. And if that wasn't enough, I was then unexpectedly blessed with even more prayers and encouragement from the lovely Elsabeth Parkinson and her family in the last 12 months of my candidature.

And now it is finished! All this I have done by the grace of Jesus my Redeemer, in the power of the Holy Spirit my Helper, and to the glory of God my Father. Thank you for sharing so much of your Joy and Peace.

List of Figures

PART A

PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS

for Corvus New Music Ensemble

Teklanika Twilight

alto flute in G
horn in F
percussion
(snare drum, sizzle cymbal, sleigh bells, glockenspiel)

David John Lang

2016

Teklanika Twilight

Program Note:

In July 2016, I went to Alaska. I was there with eight other composers for the amazing 'Composing in the Wilderness' program, led by adventurer-composer Stephen Lias.

We spent our first four days together going for day-hikes in Denali National Park. Our campsite was near the Teklanika, a braided glacial river that threads its way noisily over a wide, stony bed. We talked, ate and slept to its constant soundtrack, and over the course of our time there it grew gradually louder.

On our final night in Denali National Park, we woke at 2:15am. The sun had set, but it was not very dark - just an eerie twilight. We walked down to listen to the river one last time.

This piece was composed a few days later, while swatting away mosquitoes at Coal Creek in the Yukon-Charley Rivers Preserve.

***

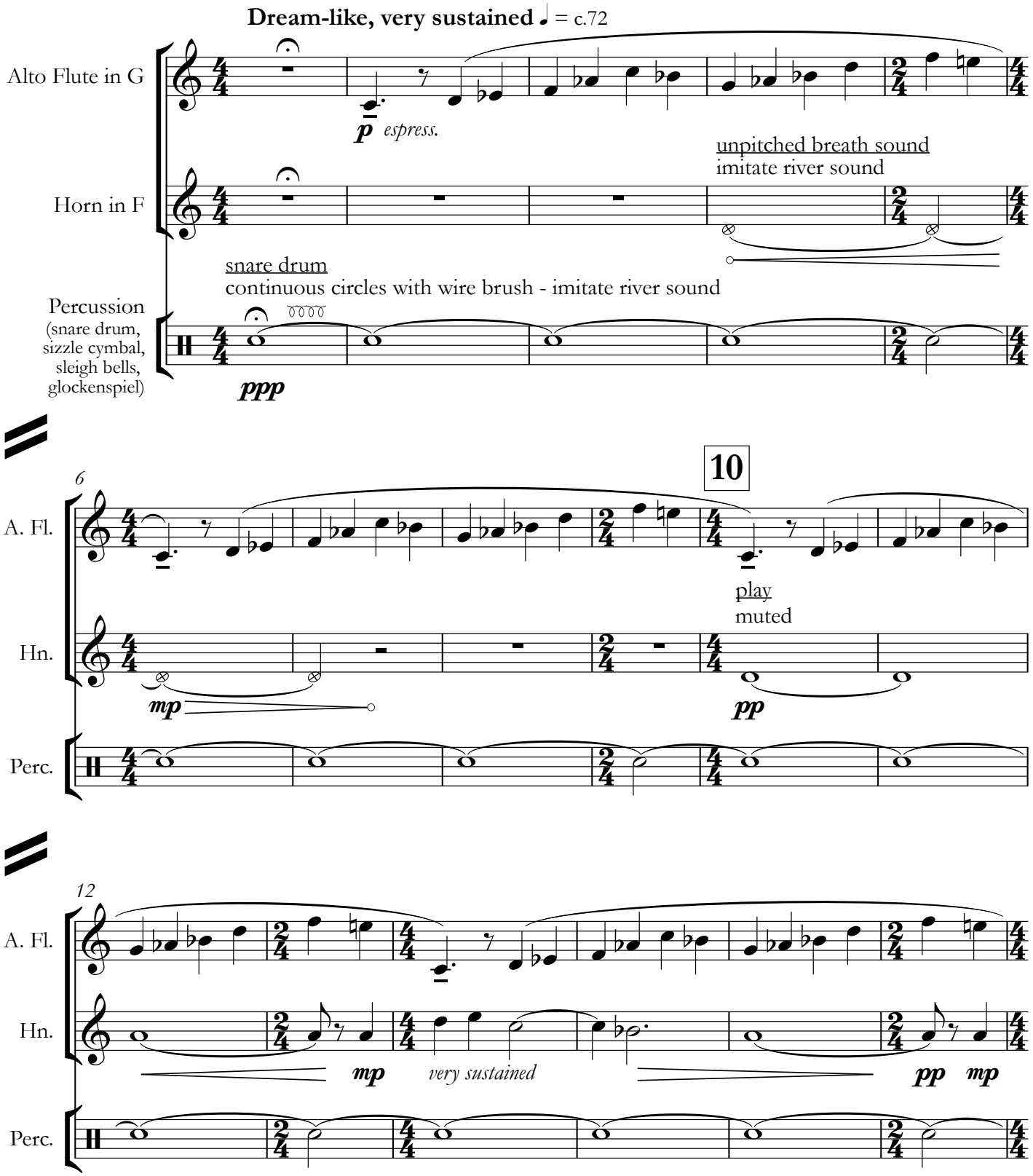
I would like to thank Corvus New Music Ensemble for premiering the work in Alaska, Davyd Betchkal for his insights on the sound of the river, Shelley Washington for rabbit-spotting at a crucial point in the creative process, Alondra Vega-Zaldivar for some much-needed last-minute encouragement, and Stephen Lias for leading such a memorable adventure.

transposed score

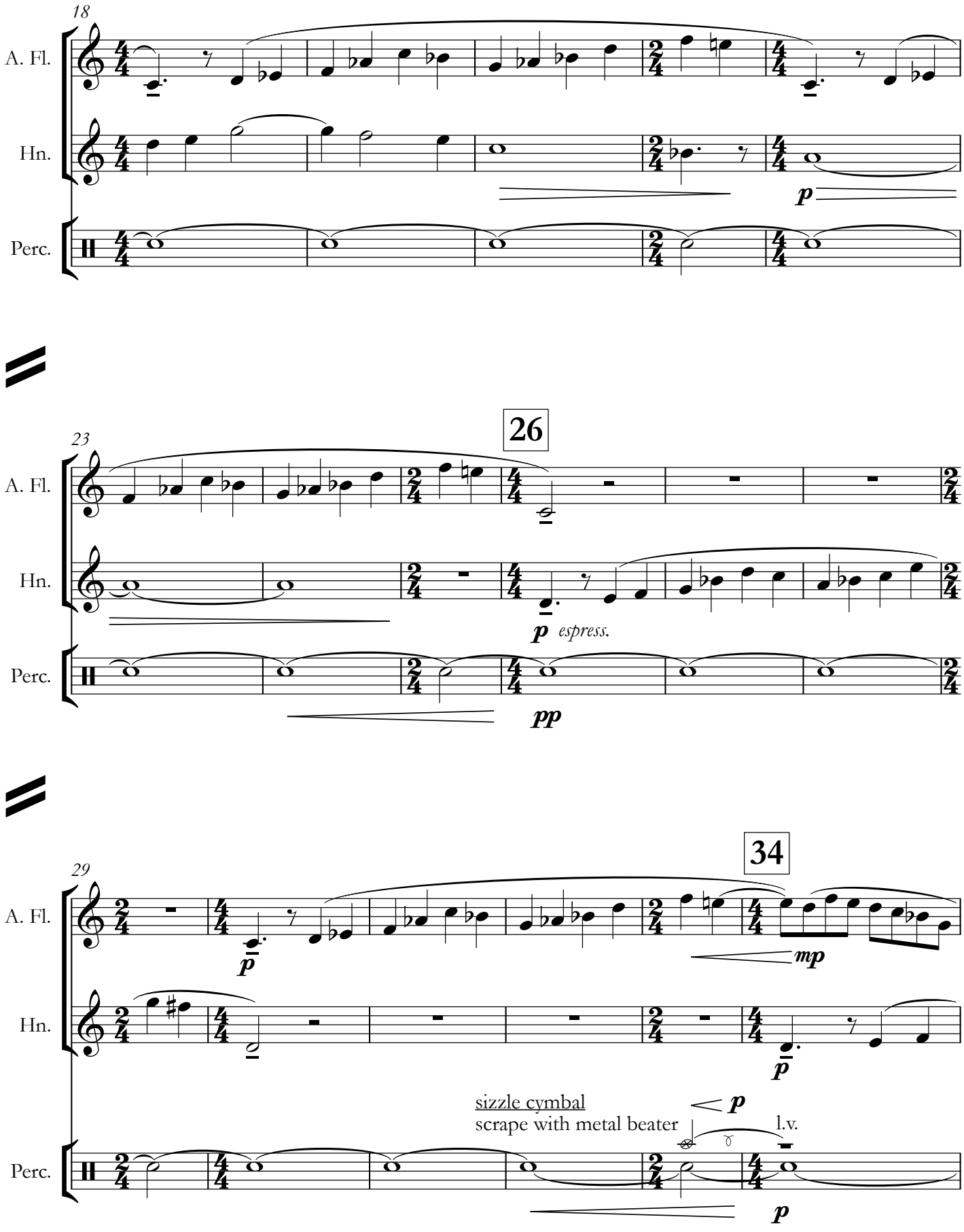
Written for *Composing in the Wilderness*, Alaska, 2016

Teklanika Twilight

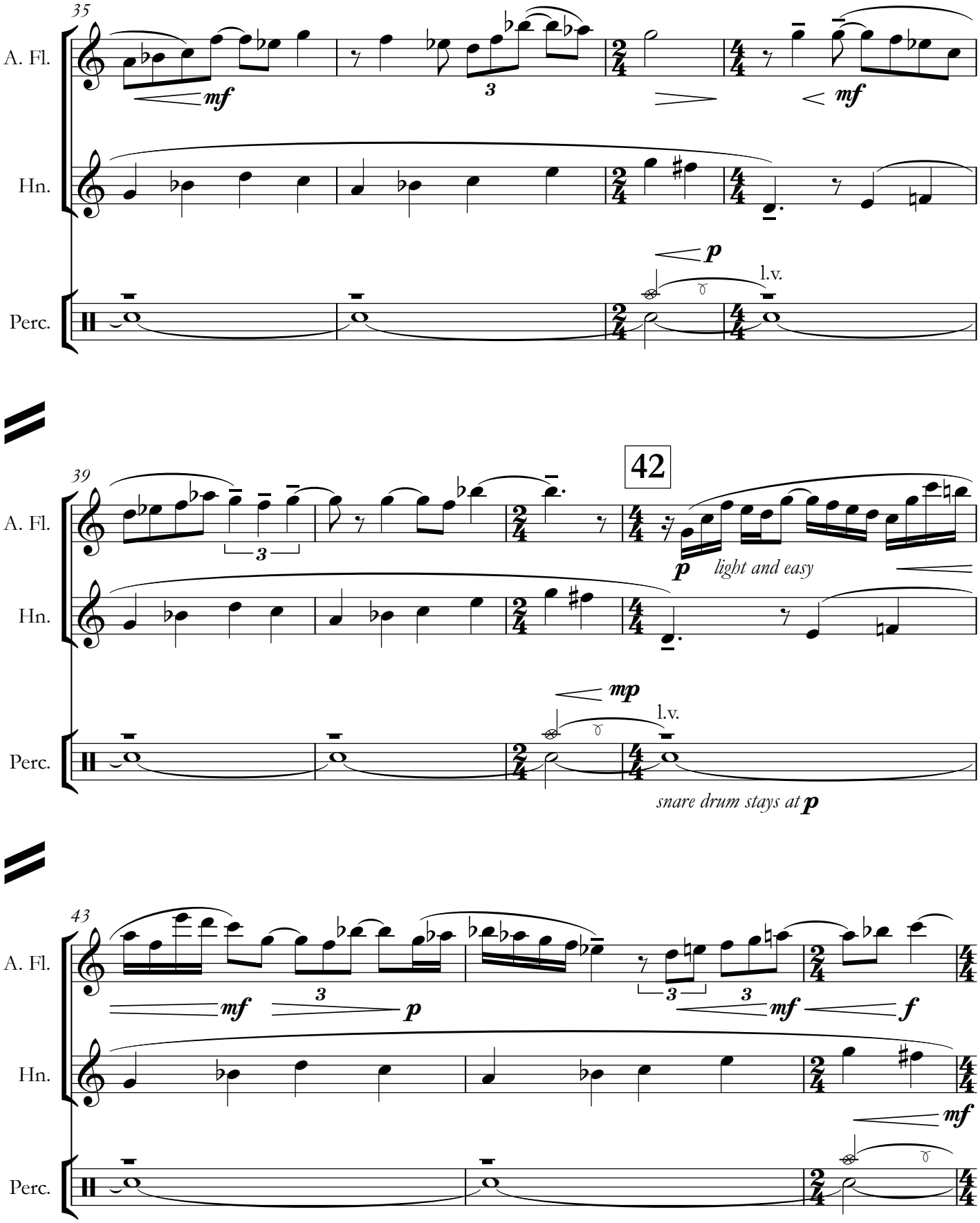
David John Lang

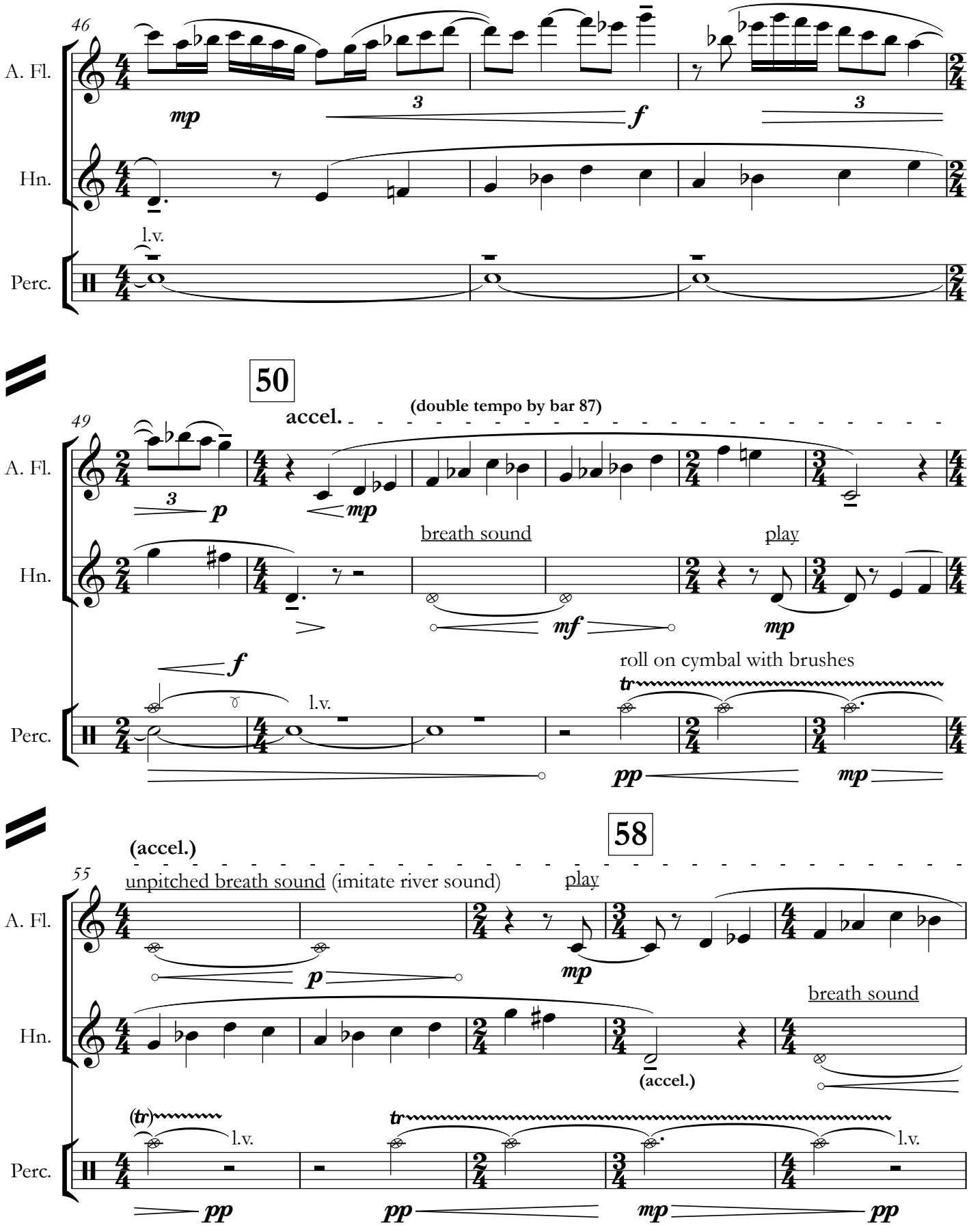


Teklanika Twilight

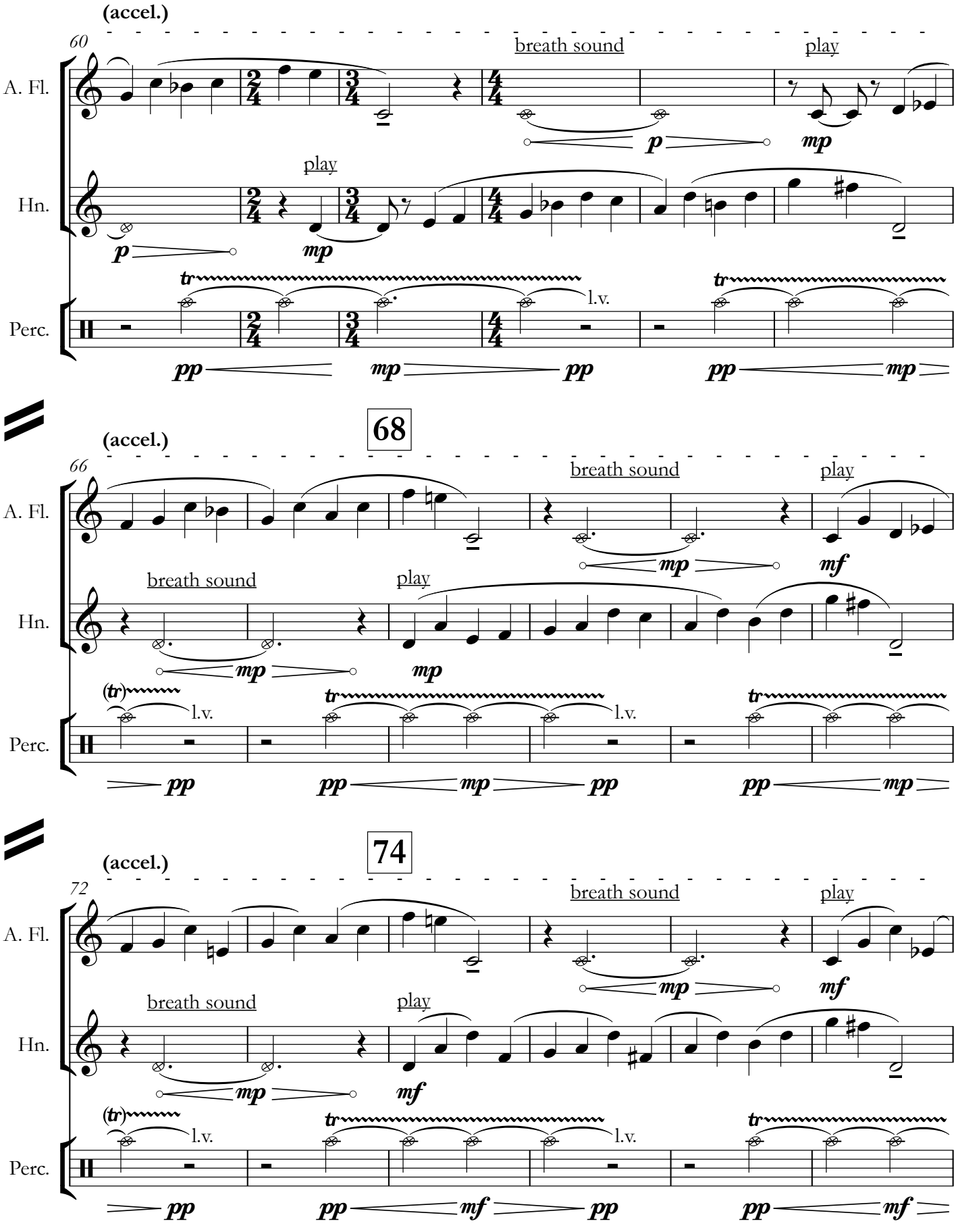


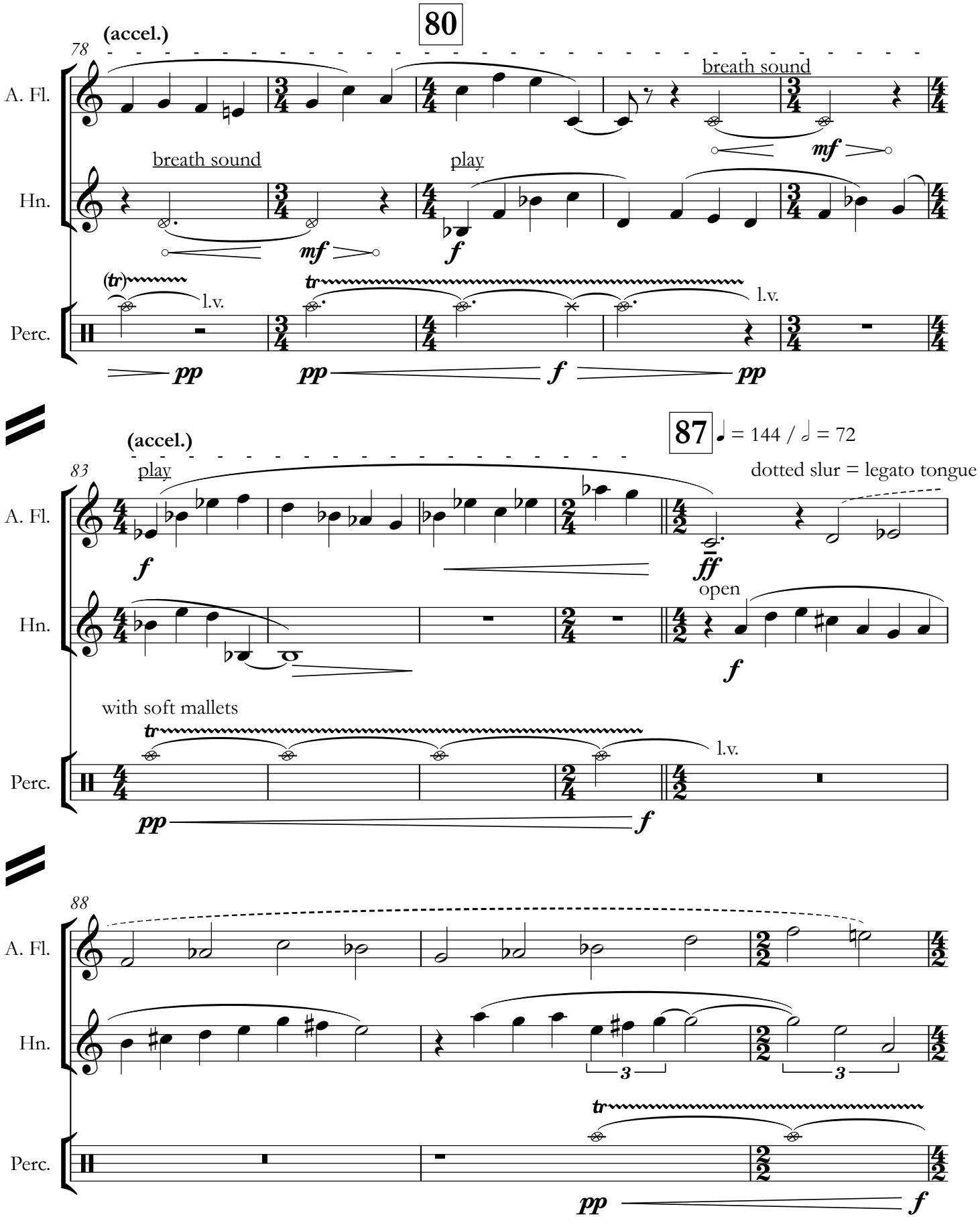
Teklanika Twilight

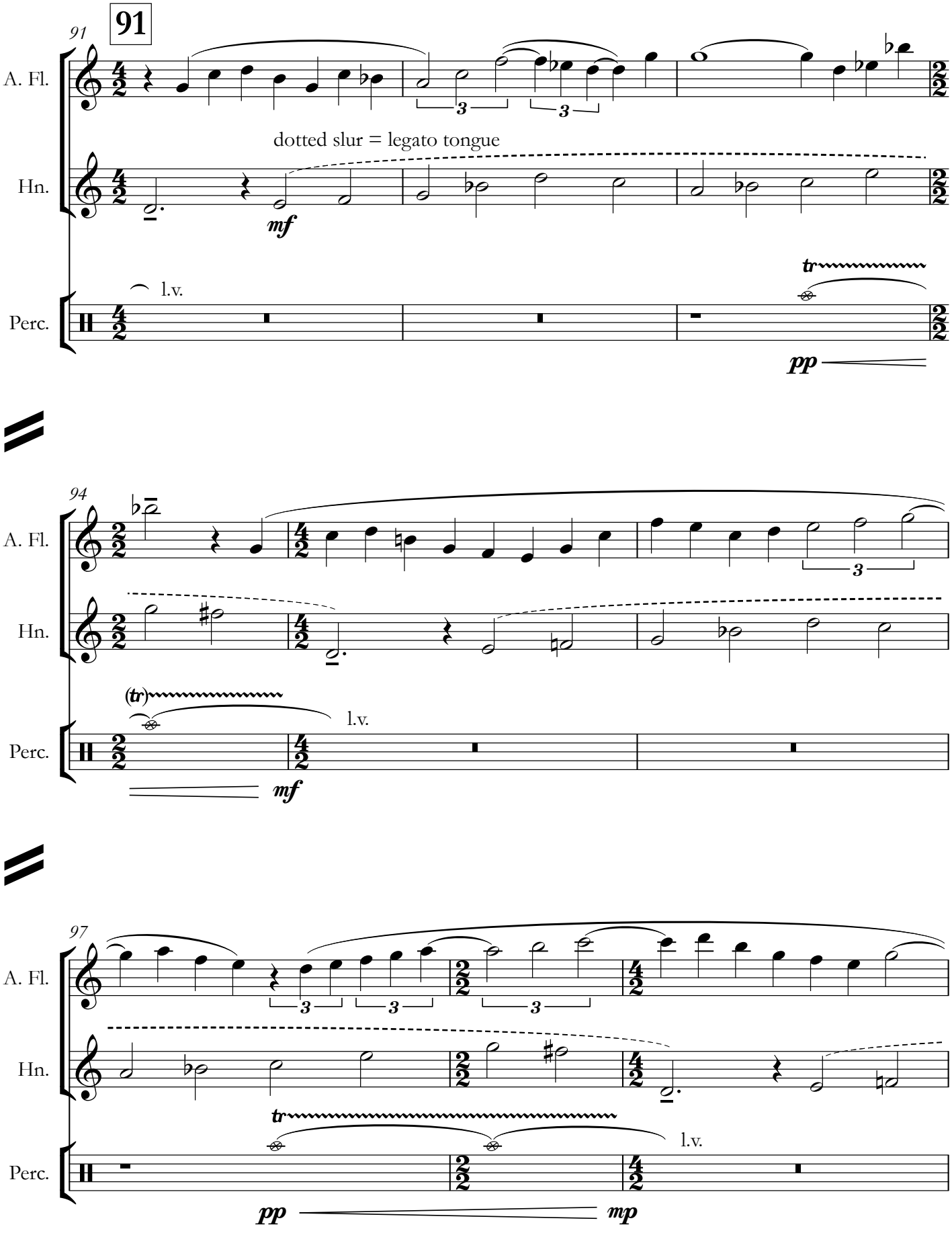



46
A. Fl.
Hn.
Perc.
mp
3
f
3
l.v.
50
49
accel.
(double tempo by bar 87)
p
mp
breath sound
play
mf
mp
f
l.v.
roll on cymbal with brushes
tr
pp
mp
58
55
(accel.)
unpitched breath sound (imitate river sound)
play
p
mp
breath sound
(accel.)
(tr)
l.v.
tr
l.v.
pp
pp
mp
pp

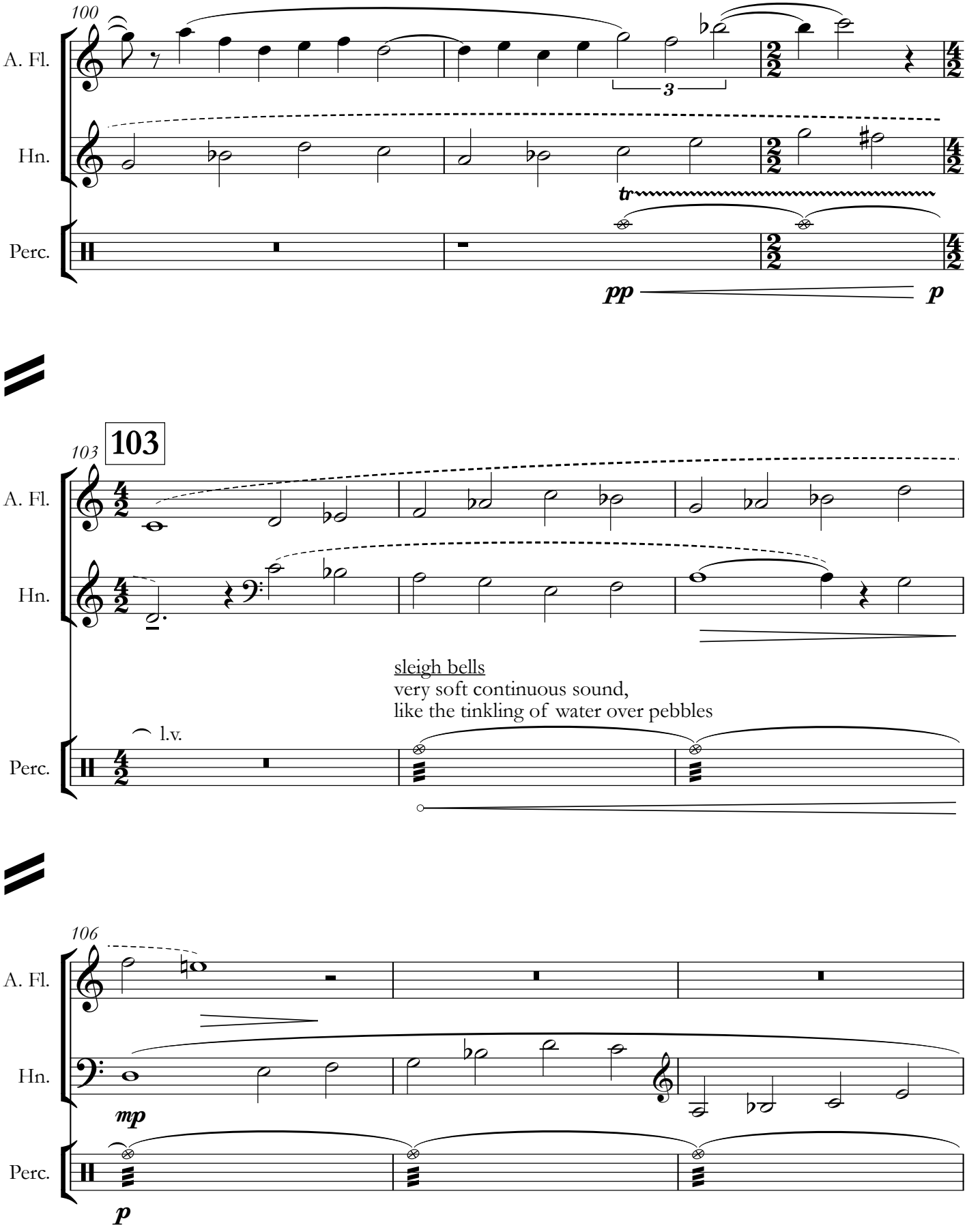
Teklanika Twilight



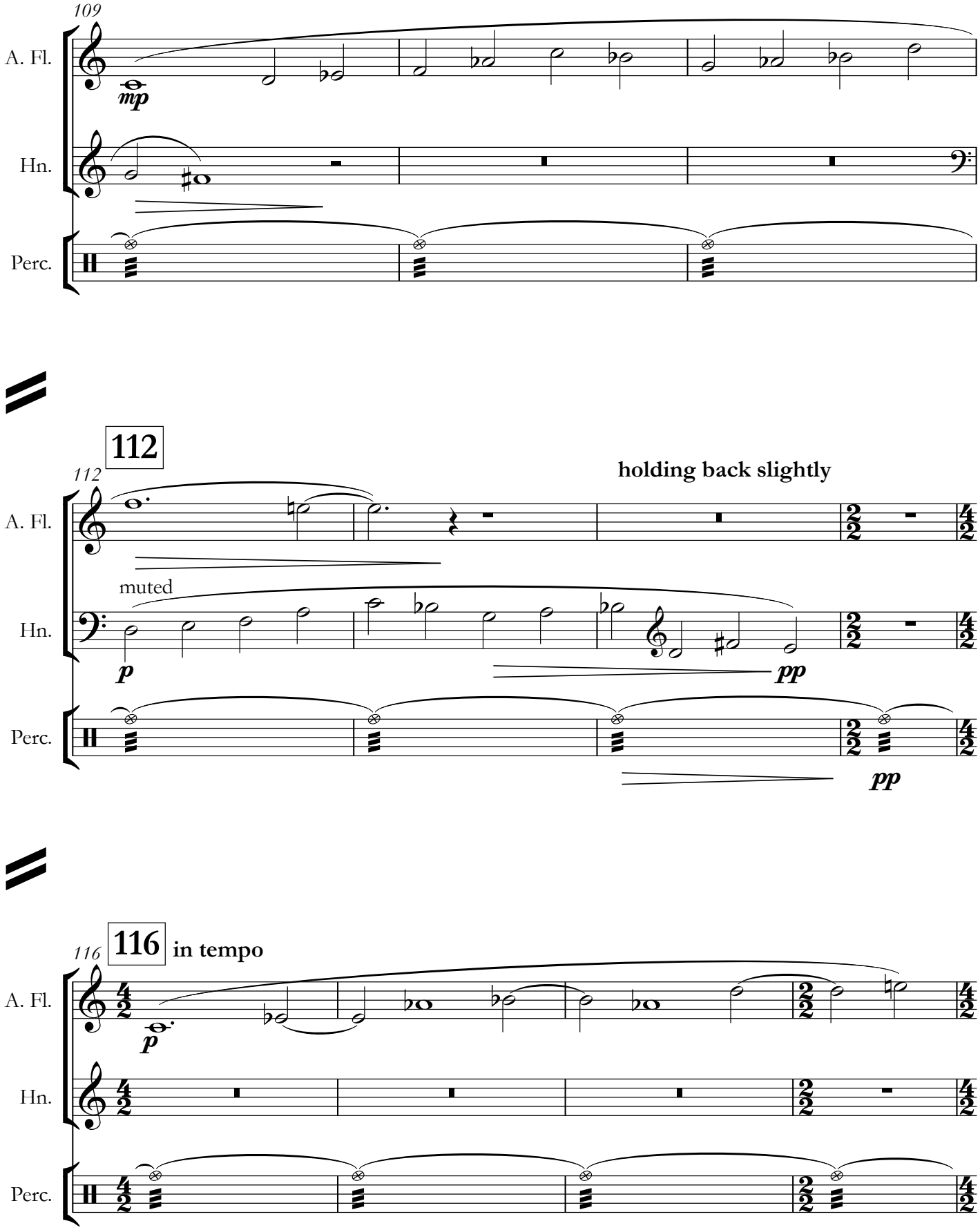

80
(accel.)
78
A. Fl.
breath sound
mf
Hn.
breath sound
mf
play
f
(tr)
l.v.
Perc.
pp
tr
pp
f
l.v.
pp
87
♩ = 144 / 𝅗𝅥 = 72
(accel.)
83
play
dotted slur = legato tongue
A. Fl.
f
ff
Hn.
open
f
with soft mallets
tr
l.v.
Perc.
pp
f
88
A. Fl.
Hn.
3
3
tr
Perc.
pp
f


91
91
A. Fl.
Hn.
Perc.
dotted slur = legato tongue
mf
l.v.
tr
pp
94
(tr)
mf
97
mp

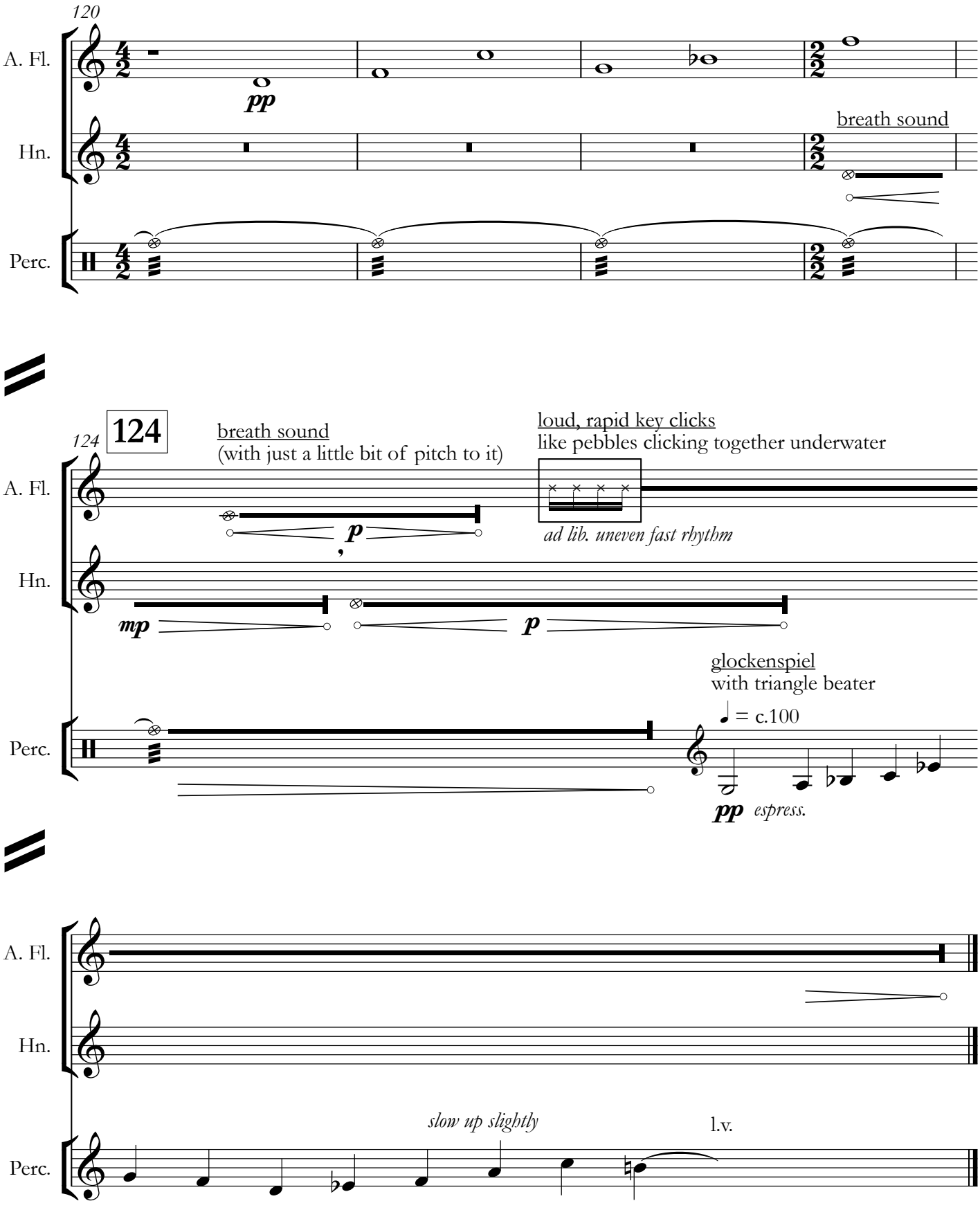
Teklanika Twilight



Teklanika Twilight



Teklanika Twilight



for India Hooi

The Imaginary Waltz

Version 1
for toy piano (right hand) and real piano (left hand)

Version 2
for ordinary piano

David John Lang

2016

The Imaginary Waltz

Program Note:

My friend Steven Tanoto organised a toy piano concert in Hamburg in 2016 and India Hooi asked me for a piece to play. I wrote her *The Imaginary Waltz* for toy piano and real piano (two hands).

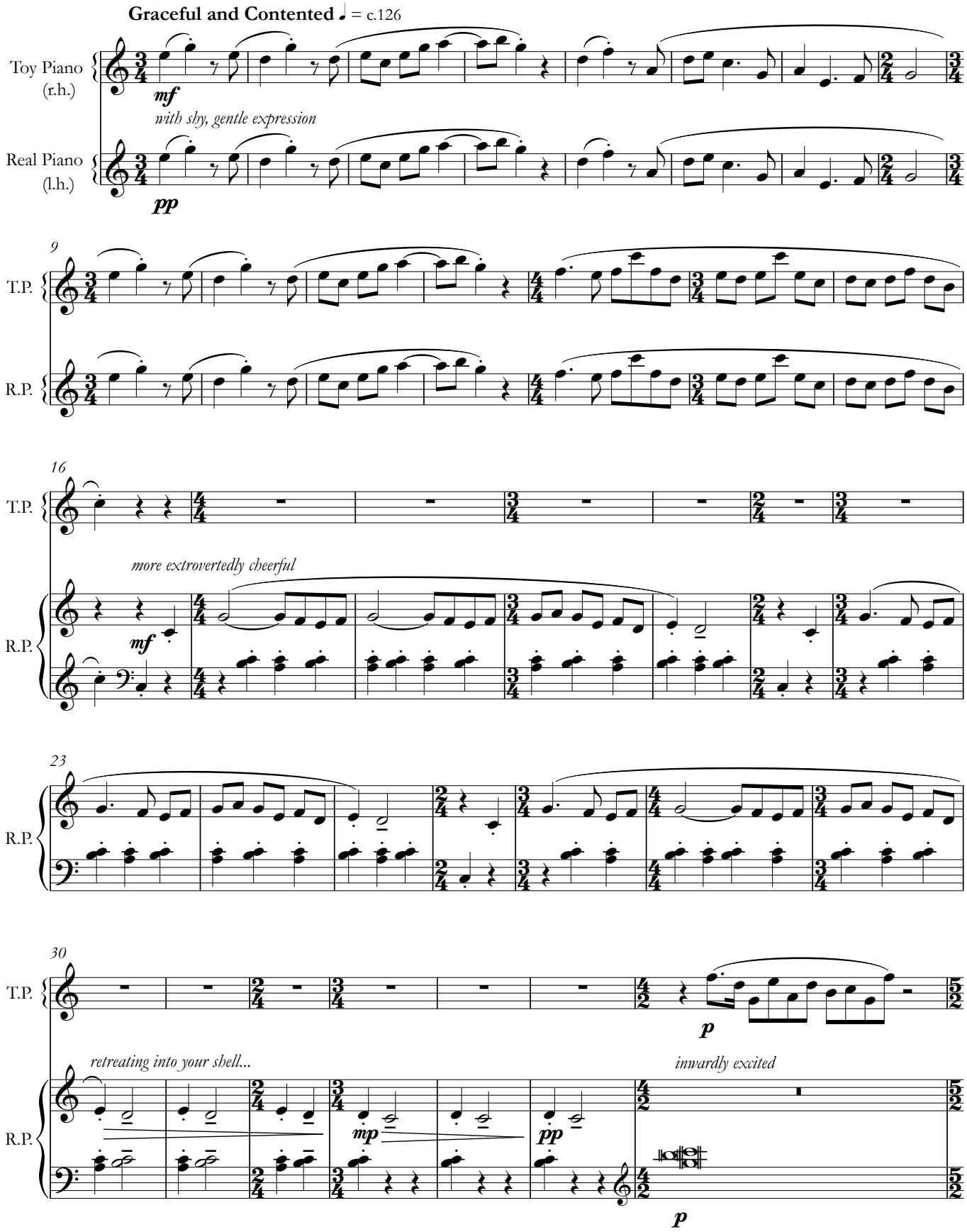
As though played by an anxious soloist, the waltz melody keeps skipping beats, getting out-of-step with its left-hand accompaniment. As a Christian, this is an image of how I see my dance with God – however awkward and faltering my own attempts, God graciously persists with the dance and somehow makes it work.

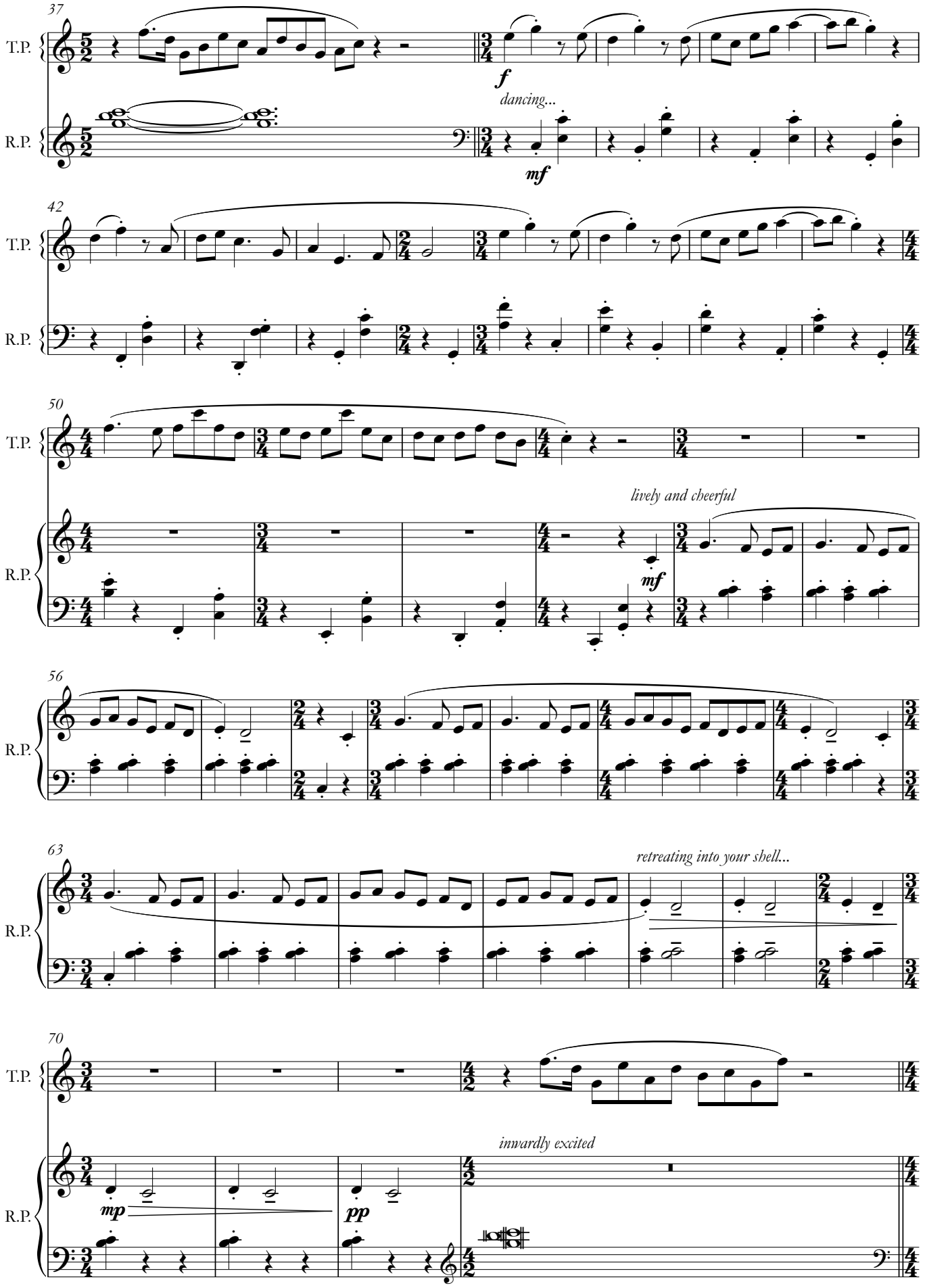
for India Hooi

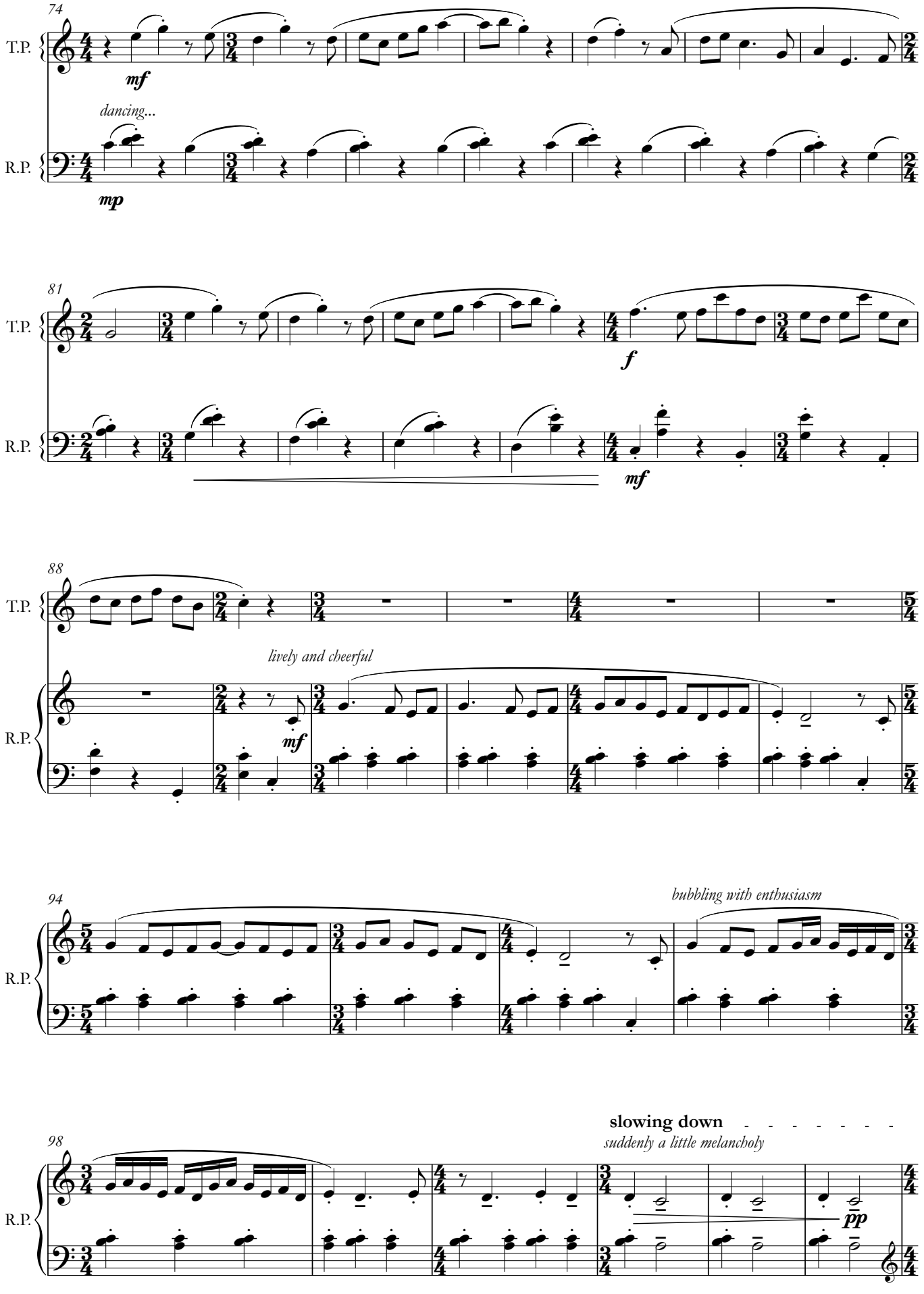
The Imaginary Waltz

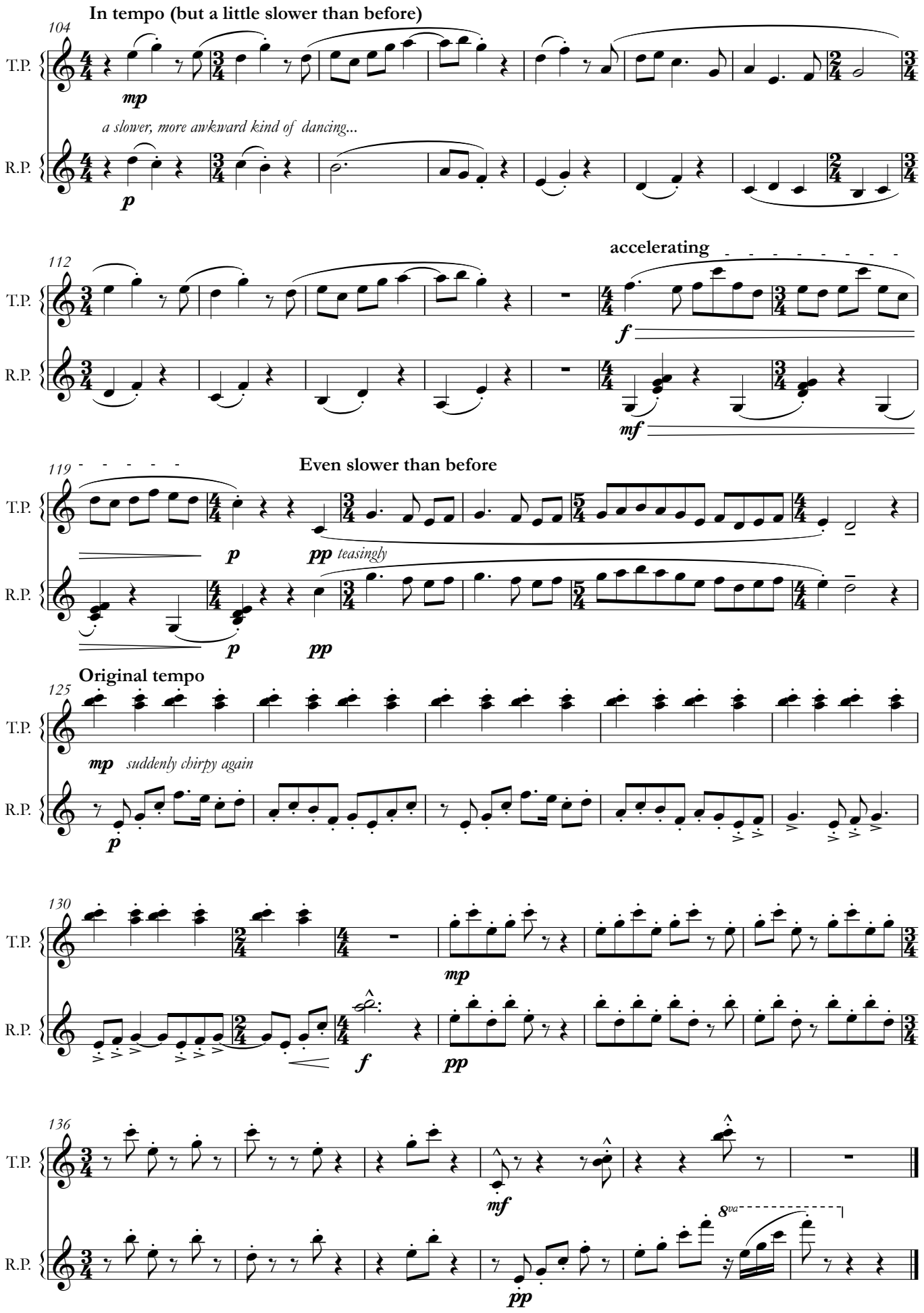
version for toy piano (right hand) and real piano (left hand)

David John Lang




37
T.P.
R.P.
f
dancing...
mf
42
50
lively and cheerful
56
63
retreating into your shell...
70
inwardly excited
mp
pp


74
T.P.
mf
dancing...
R.P.
mp
81
T.P.
f
R.P.
mf
88
T.P.
lively and cheerful
R.P.
mf
94
R.P.
bubbling with enthusiasm
98
R.P.
slowing down
suddenly a little melancholy
pp


In tempo (but a little slower than before)
104
T.P.
mp
a slower, more awkward kind of dancing...
R.P.
p
112
accelerating
f
mf
119
Even slower than before
p
pp teasingly
pp
Original tempo
125
mp suddenly chirpy again
p
130
mp
f
pp
136
mf
8va
pp

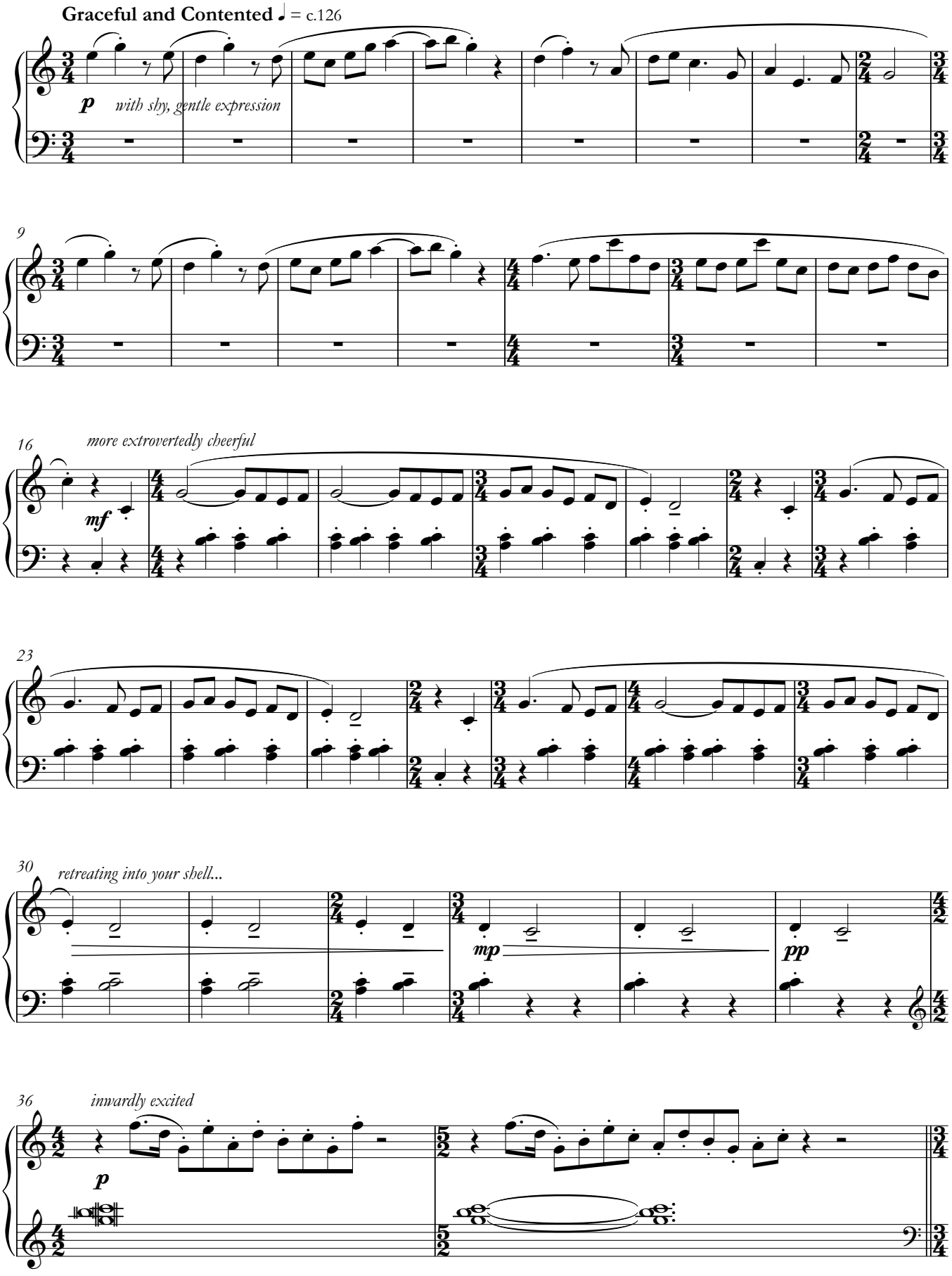
for India Hooi

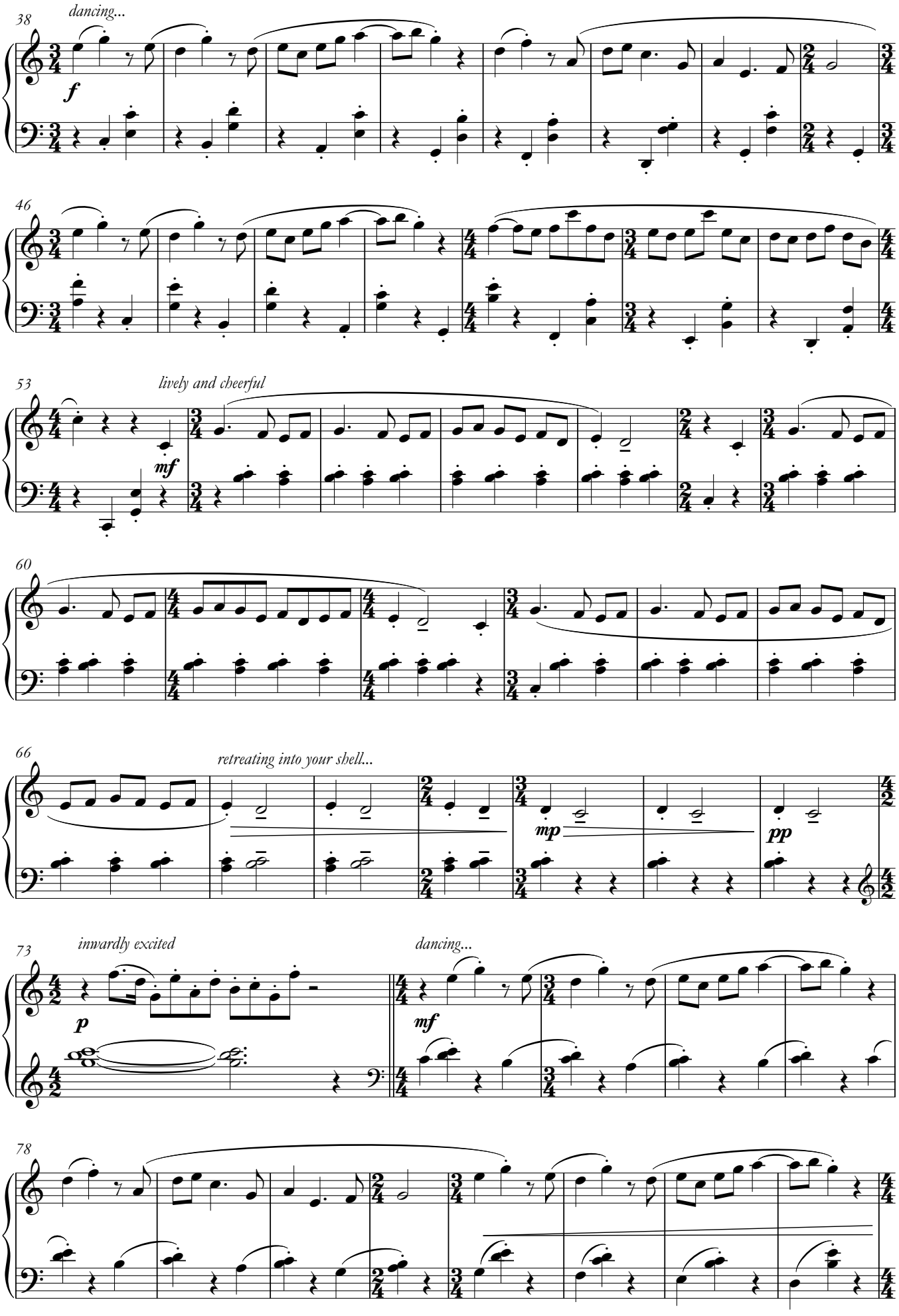
The Imaginary Waltz

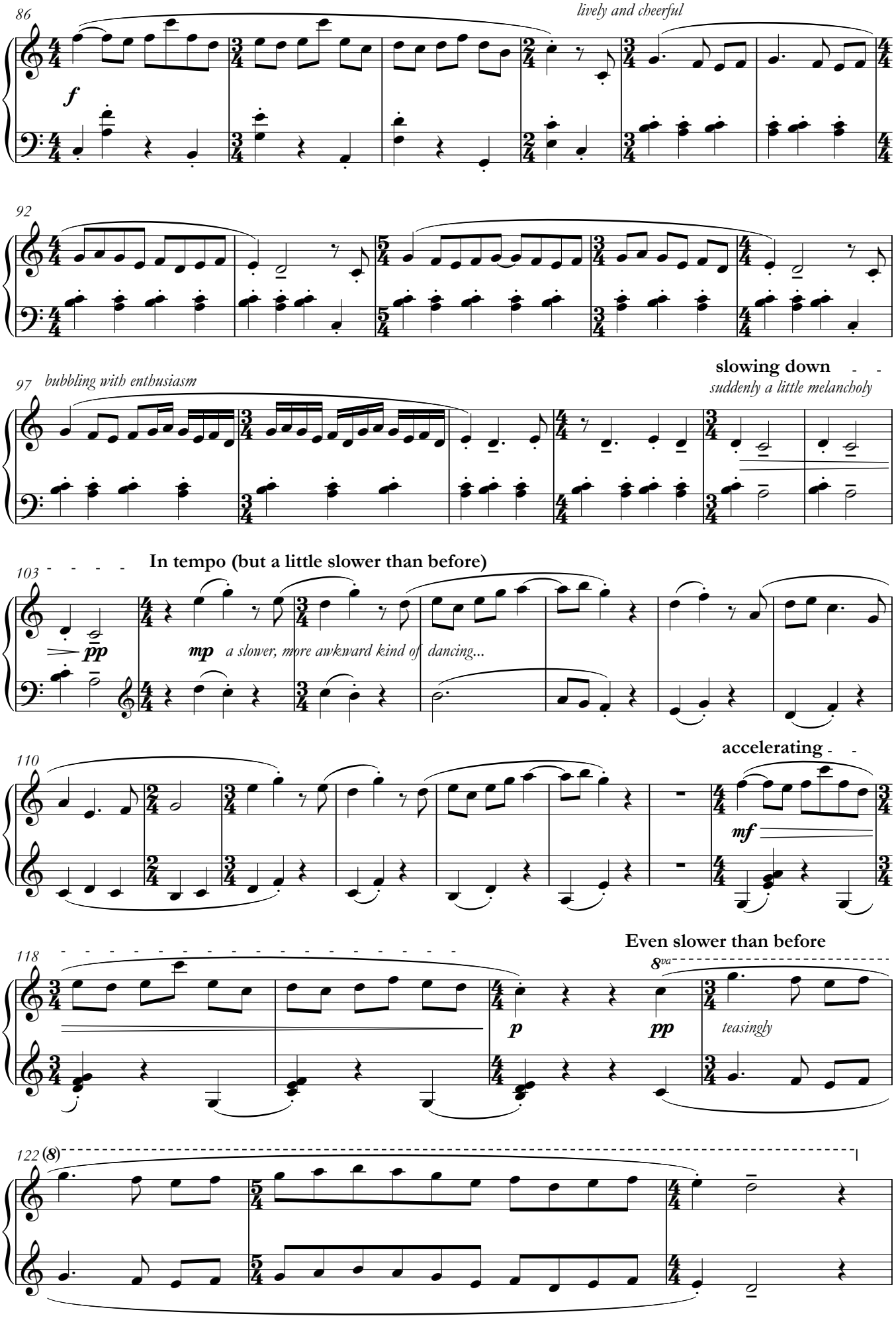
version for ordinary piano

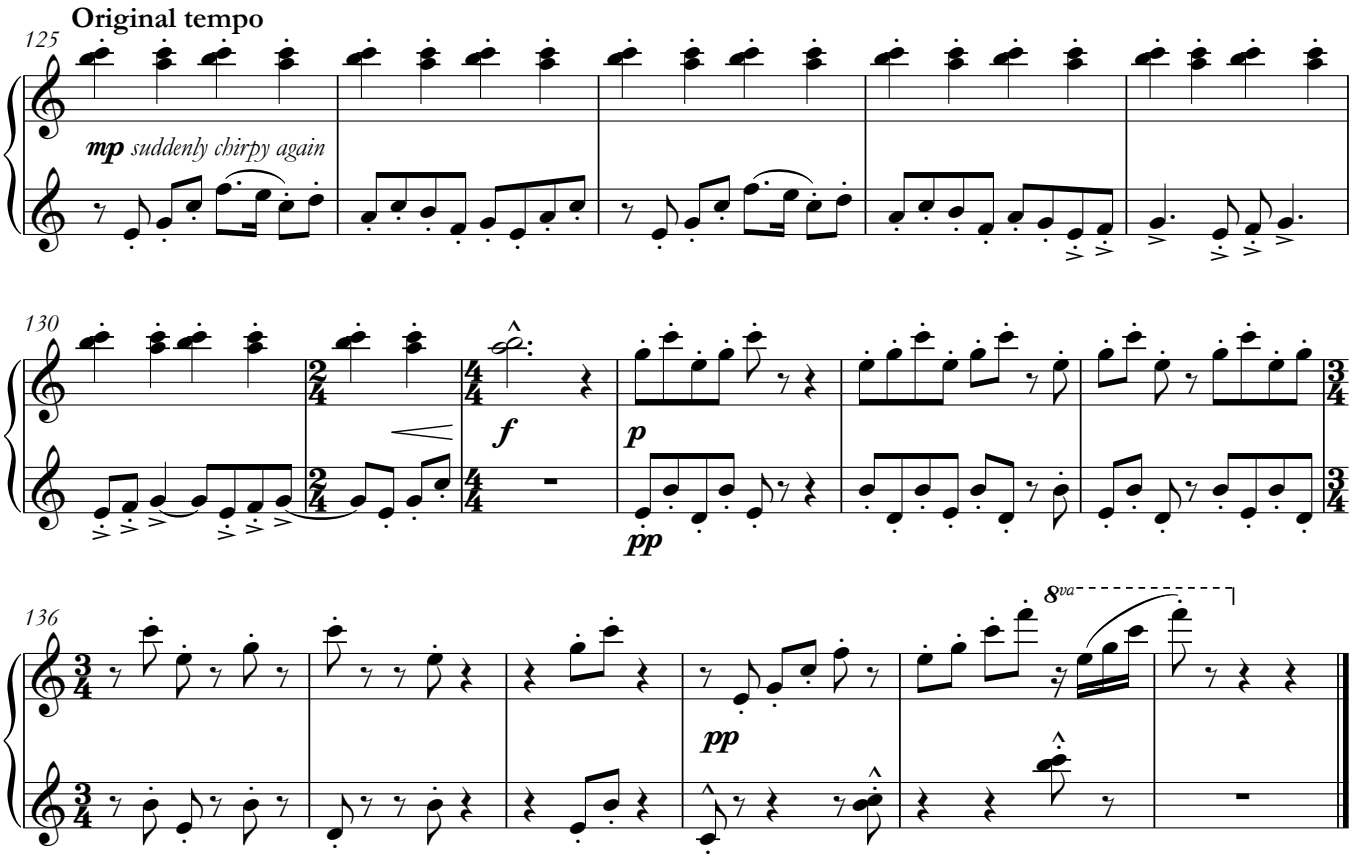
David John Lang

Graceful and Contented ♩ = c.126




38
dancing...
f
46
53
lively and cheerful
mf
60
66
retreating into your shell...
mp
pp
73
inwardly excited
p
dancing...
mf
78


86
lively and cheerful
f
92
97
bubbling with enthusiasm
slowing down
suddenly a little melancholy
103
In tempo (but a little slower than before)
pp
mp
a slower, more awkward kind of dancing...
110
accelerating
mf
118
Even slower than before
8va
p
pp
teasingly
122
(8)


Original tempo
125
mp suddenly chirpy again
130
f
p
pp
136
8va
pp

Yukon Sunrise

for wind orchestra

Instrumentation:

Piccolo
Flutes 1, 2
Oboes 1,2
Clarinet in E♭
Clarinets in B♭ 1, 2, 3
Bass Clarinet in B♭
Bassoon 1, 2
Soprano Saxophone
Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone

Trumpets in B♭ 1, 2, 3
Horns in F 1, 2
Trombones 1, 2
Bass Trombone
Euphonium
Tuba

Celesta

Timpani

Percussion 1, 2, 3
(snare drum, bass drum, triangle, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, glass wind chimes, bamboo wind chimes, bag of pebbles, glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone)

David John Lang

2016

Yukon Sunrise

a free gift
a dawn I did not ask to see
flooding through the window at a quarter to four

held in amber light
filled and thrilled anew
with life
I rise
I swim downstairs through honey-coloured air
and softly tread the wooden floor
slide back the crossbar from the door
and step outside

mosquitoes sing the morning chorus
and I wander through the grass
and turn toward the north
where heavy folds of hills and clouds
are stained with gold
and everything glows darkly in the morning light
forest
river
sky
water gliding swiftly past the bank
and dancing in the nearby creek
and softly softly tapping the treetops

the sunrise drowns itself in daylight
the overcasting sky turns ashy white
all beauty pales before the miracle of life

for what does it cost to burn the clouds?
to melt the river?
to raise the spruce?
to feed the birds and pollinate the flowers?
to wake the sleeper?
ouch
I slap my arm absent-mindedly
and leave a trail of blood

Inspired by the sunrise of the 21st July 2016 at Slaven's Roadhouse, near Coal Creek on the Yukon River, Alaska.

Yukon Sunrise

Program Note:

In July 2016, I spent several weeks in Alaska with nine other composers on a program called ‘Composing in the Wilderness’. The first few days were spent in Denali National Park, and then we were flown by bush-plane to a remote spot near the Yukon River where we had three days to compose something, in between getting rained on and getting eaten alive by mosquitoes.

Grey skies, wild forest on all sides and an impending deadline made the place feel strangely closed-in. So it was with great relief that I finished my composition with a day to spare (a little trio called *Teklanika Twilight*) and ventured down to the Yukon River itself with some of the other composers for our final night in the wilderness. We set up our sleeping bags in Slaven’s Roadhouse, right by the edge of the river. Our window faced north, and as we slept the sun had a brief nap just behind the hills across the water. It’s never really dark at that time of year. But there’s still a sunrise of sorts, as I discovered very early the next morning.

Now, the reason I write music (and occasionally poetry) is for the glory of God, and believe me, his glory was on full display that morning. I had never felt so small, and so happy to be so small. This was not at all a time of self-reflection; I simply opened my eyes and the light poured in. I had to be outside. It was so beautiful that I almost didn’t mind the mosquitoes.

Performance Notes:

Please don't rush. Let the music unfold in an unhurried manner – this music is meant to create a space in which the listener can simply be still. Don't try and make things happen; let the music grow in its own time.

The mosquitoes in bars 20 to 30 (muted trumpets, stopped horns) can be as obnoxious as you like. When they return at the end (trumpet mouthpiece buzzes) there should be the same kind of obnoxious quality to the crescendos, as annoying as when a mosquito flies right past your ear.

The sounds from the wind chimes and the bag of pebbles should not be overdone – they need to sound natural and not too deliberate. The effect of the pebbles should be like the sound of water running along a stony creek – an irregular but continuous chattering in the background. If possible, have the pebbles in a net bag to maximize the sound of stone on stone and avoid any other sounds.

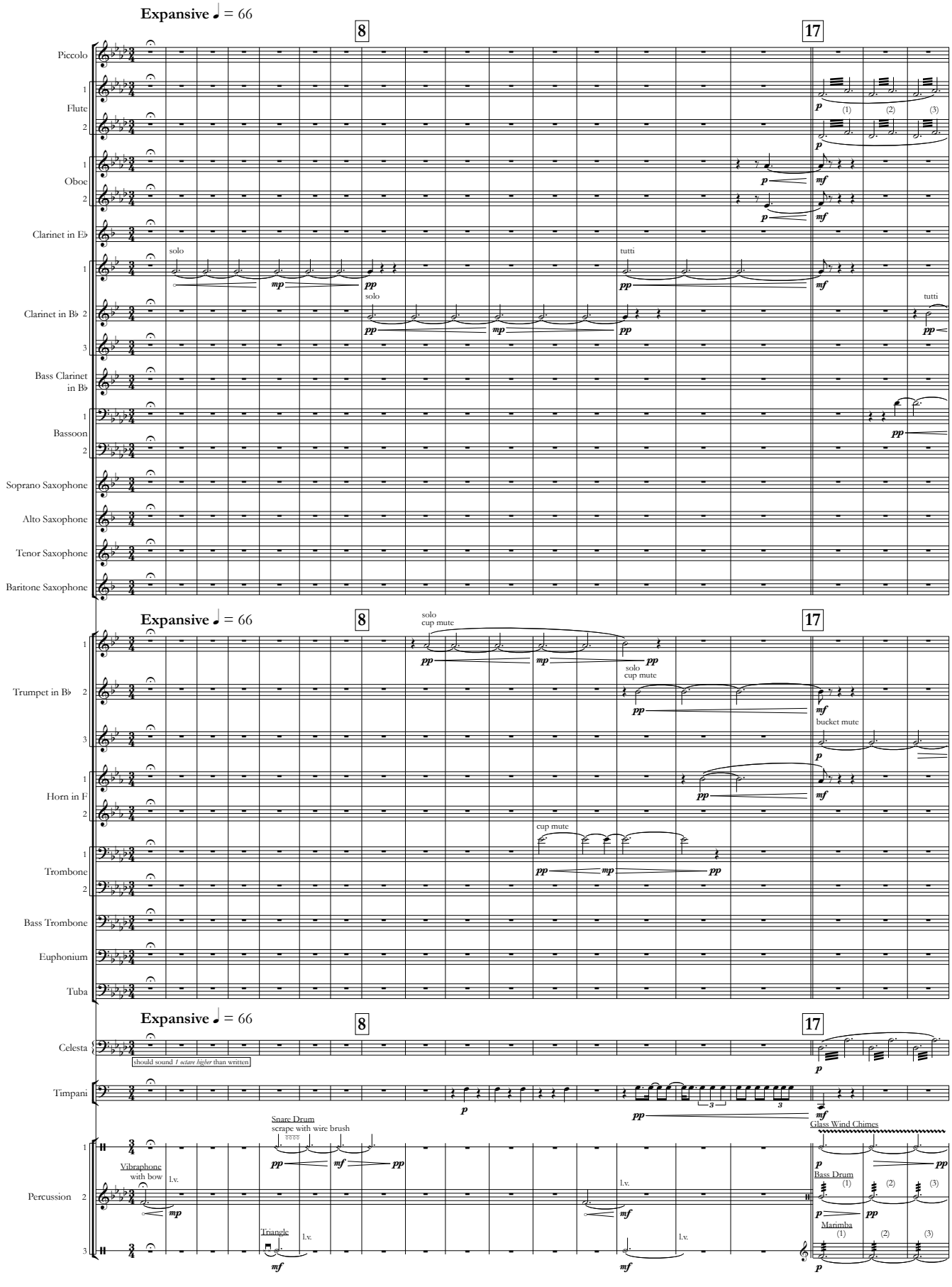
I would like to thank Stephen Lias for organizing and leading the 'Composing in the Wilderness' experience, and the other Nine Wolves who joined me there in 2016. I'd also like to thank Graeme Koehne, Luke Dollman and Howard Parkinson for their suggestions while this piece was being written.

Yukon Sunrise was first performed by the Elder Conservatorium Wind Orchestra, conducted by Luke Dollman, at a Lunch Hour Concert in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, on 7 October 2016.

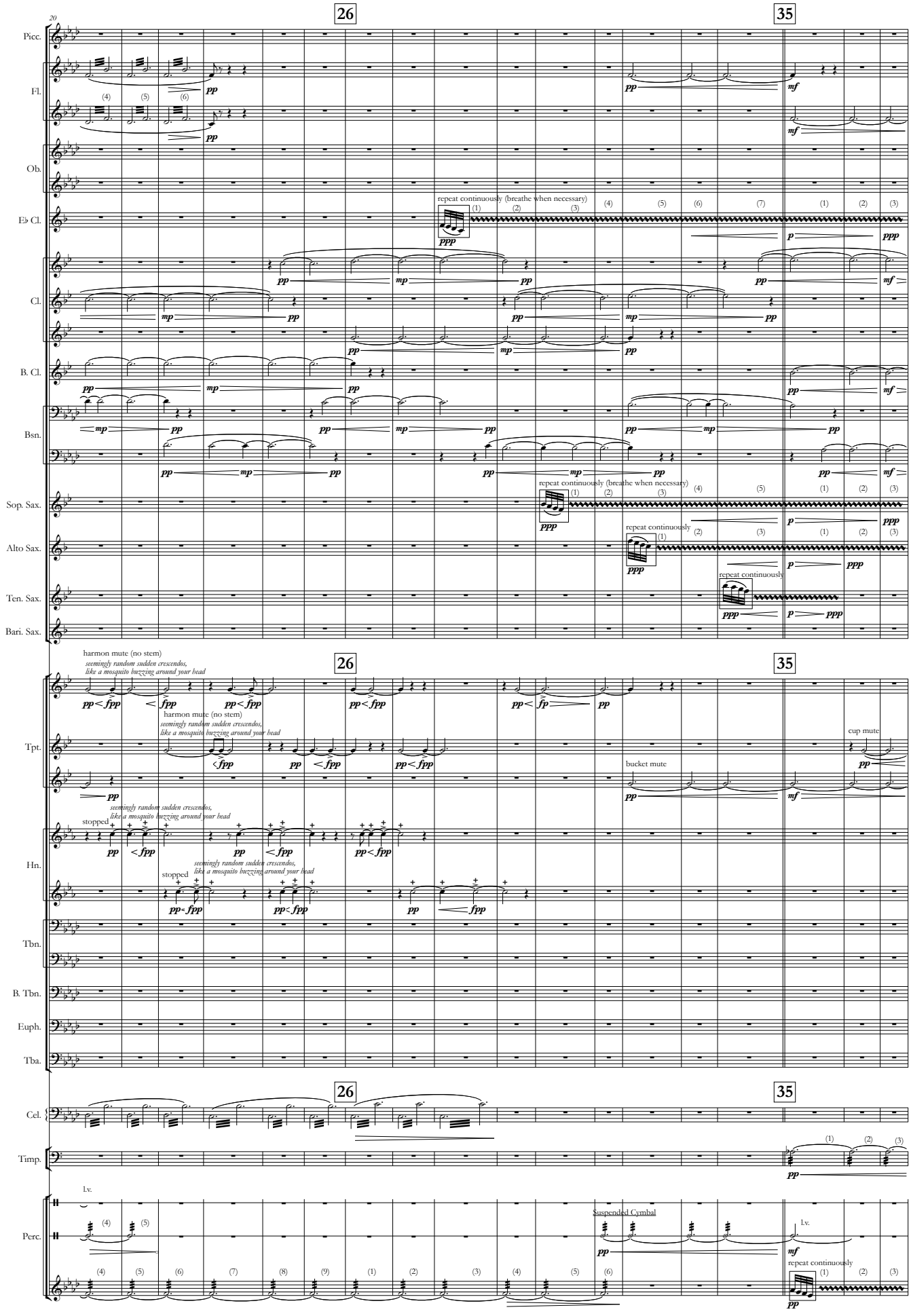
transposed score

Yukon Sunrise

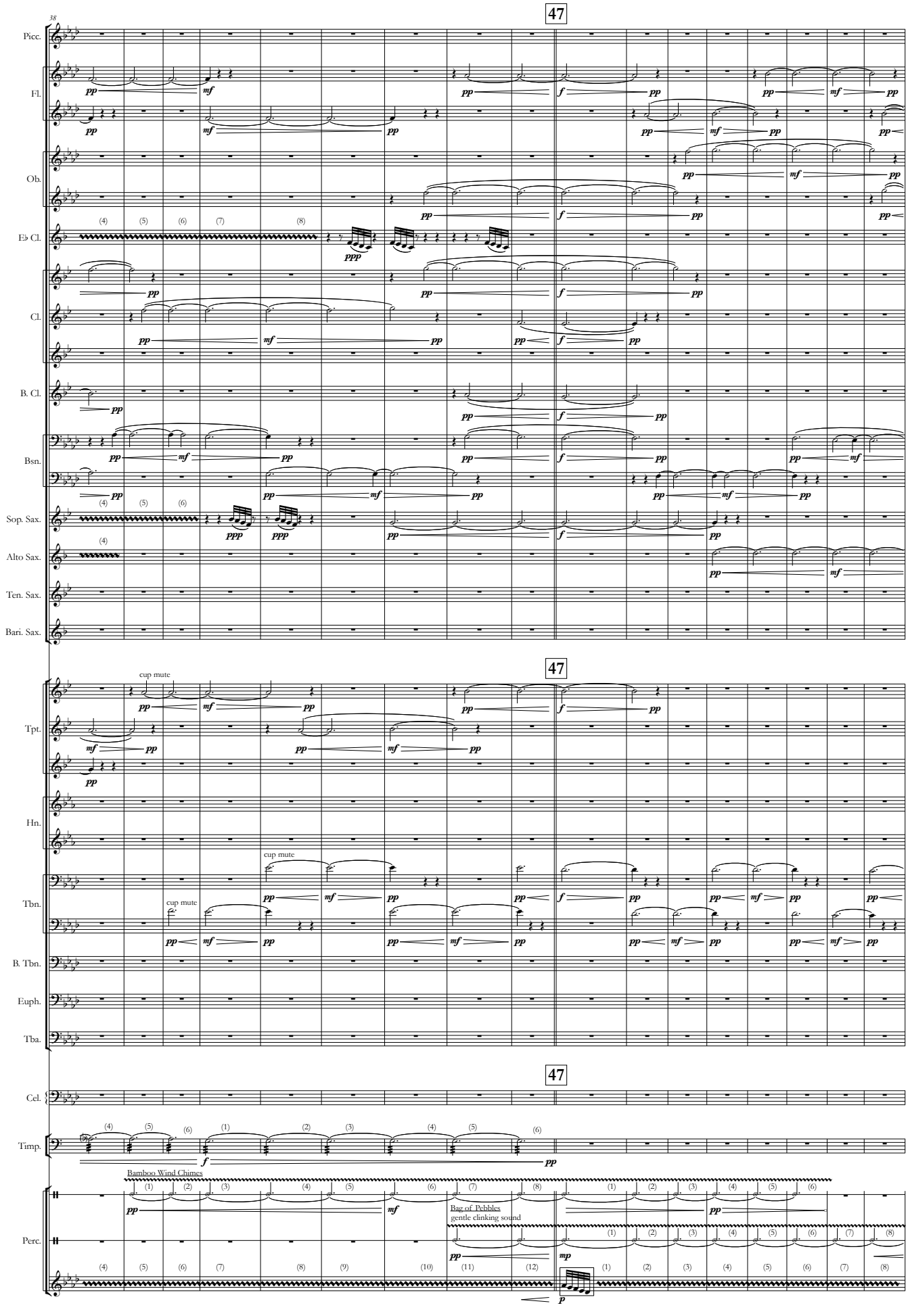
David John Lang



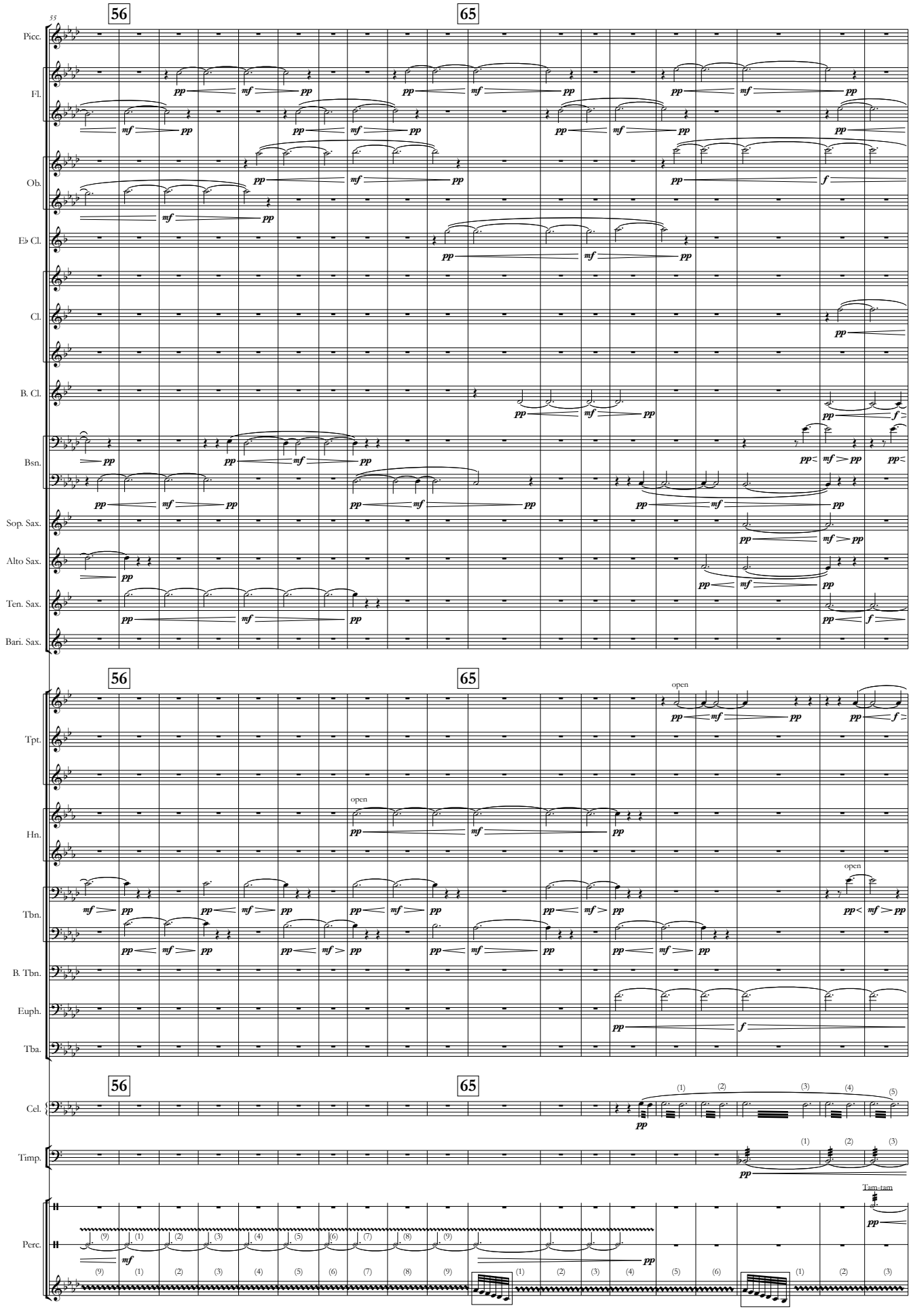
Yukon Sunrise



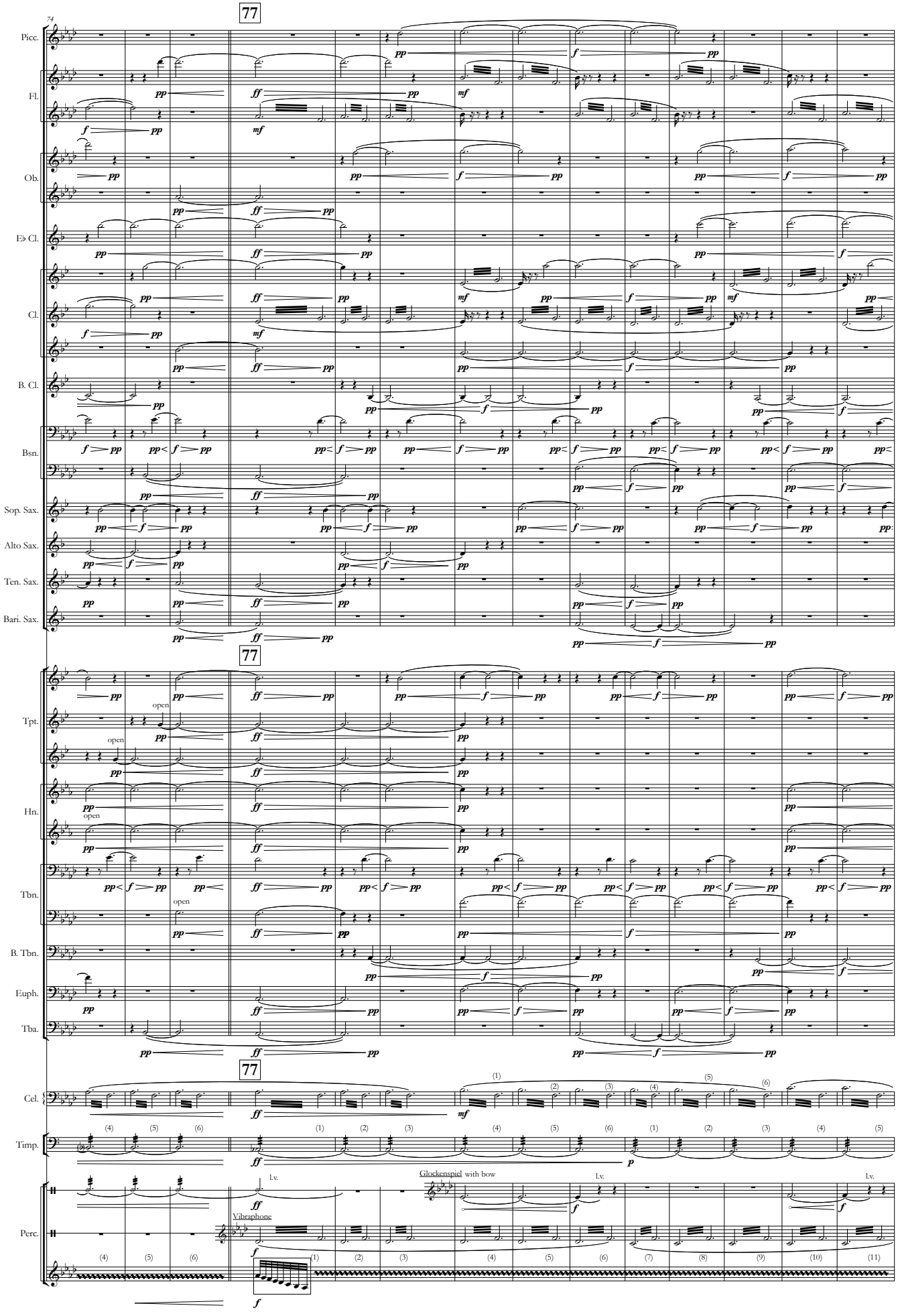
Yukon Sunrise



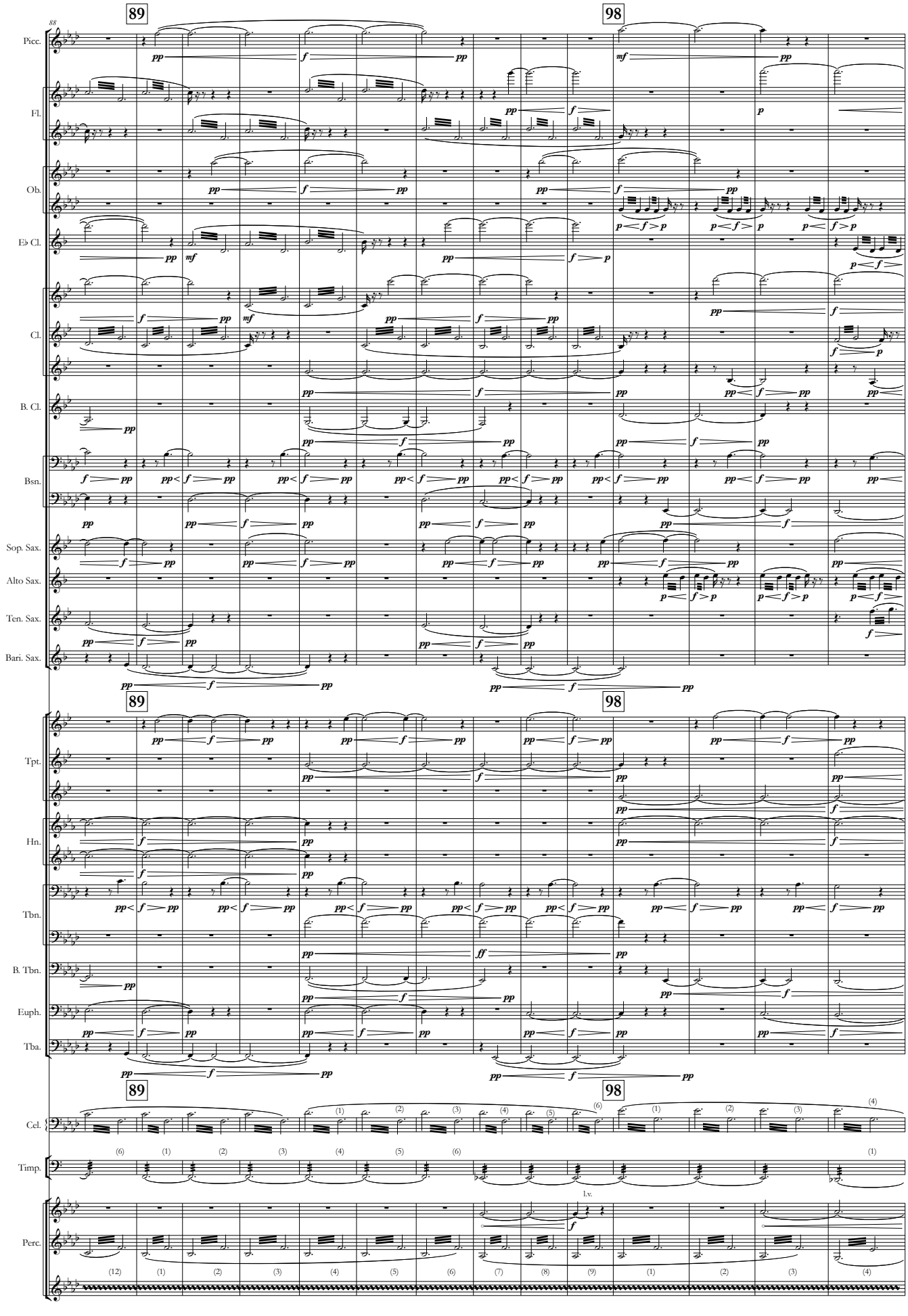
Yukon Sunrise



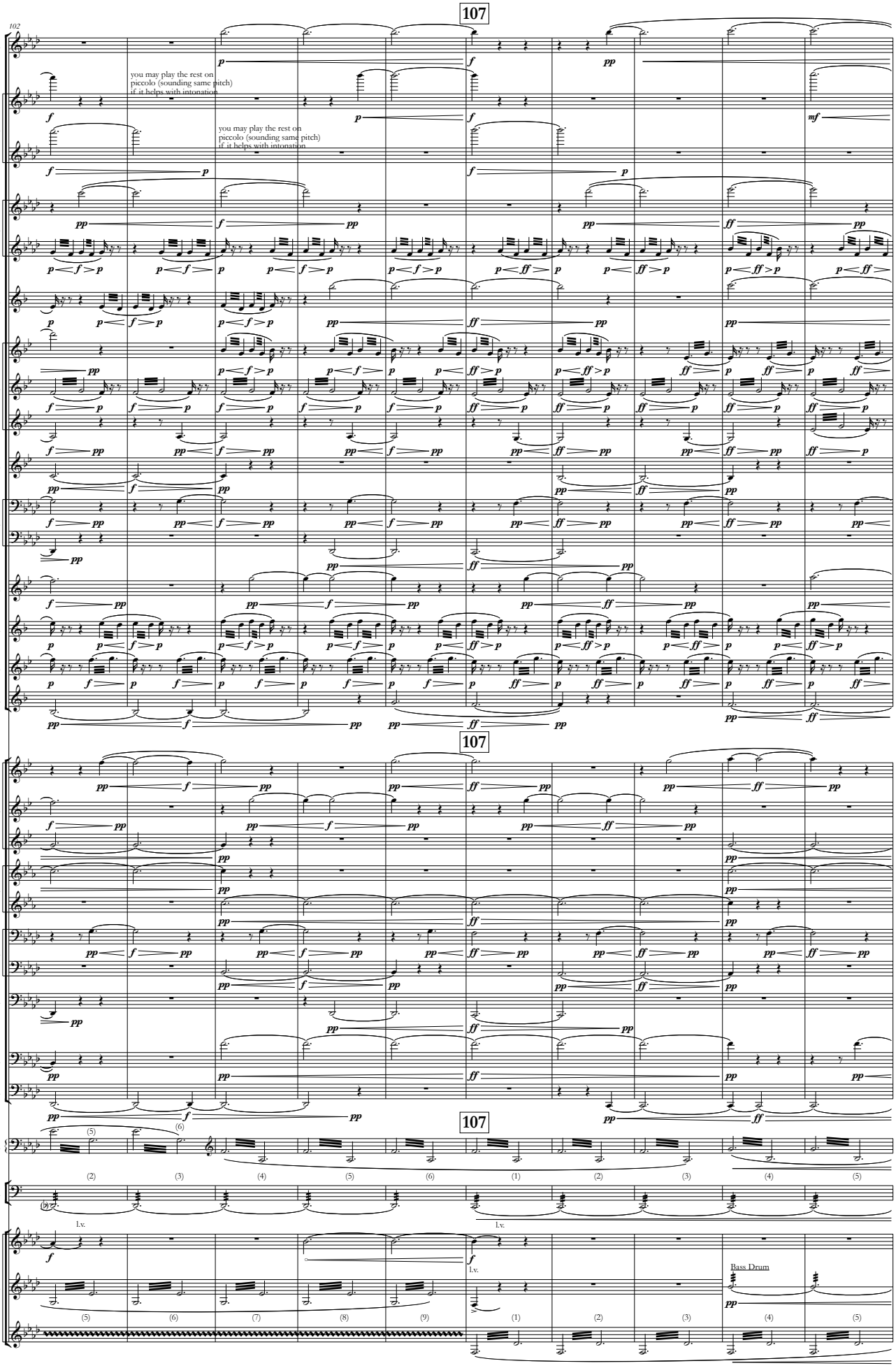
Yukon Sunrise



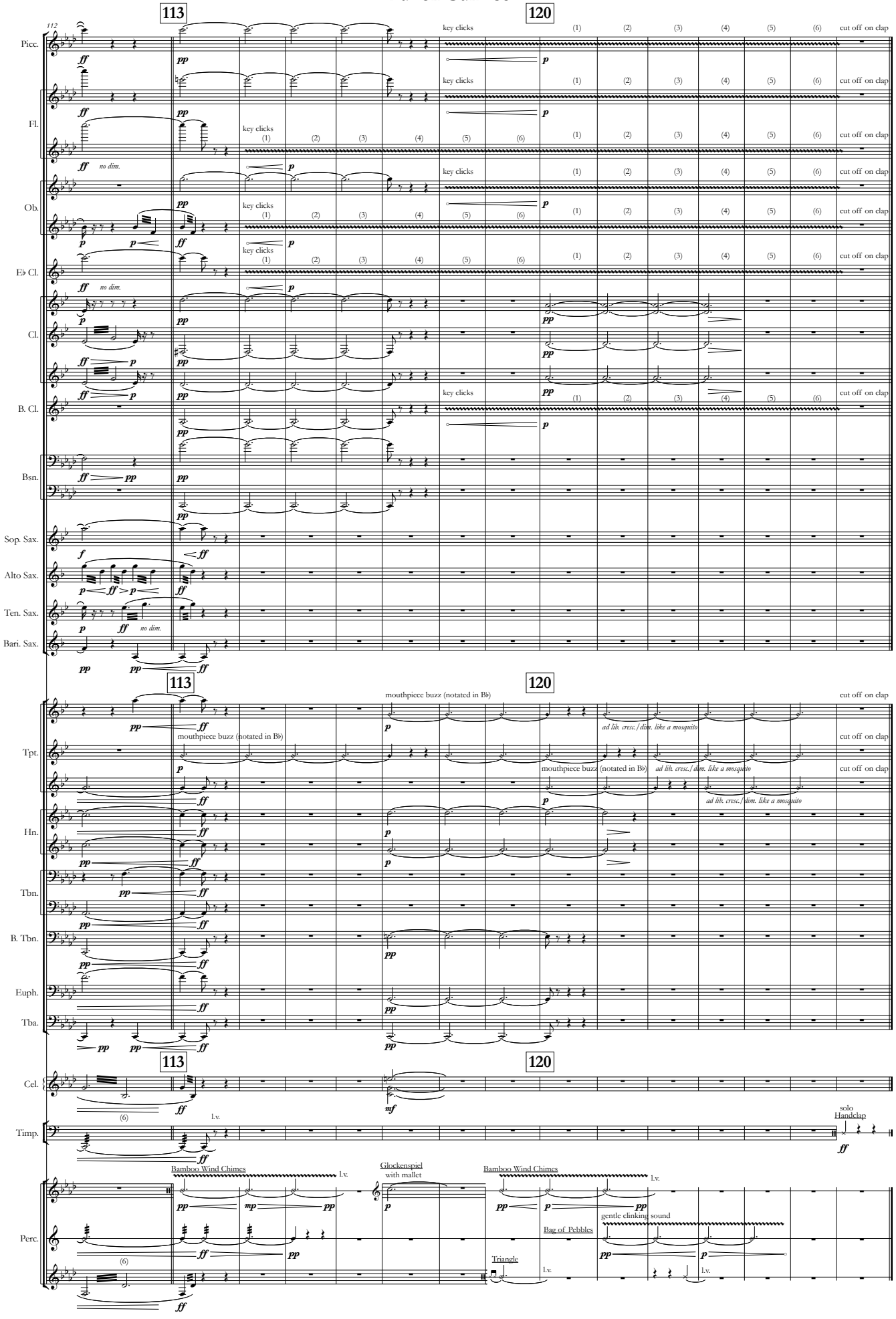
Yukon Sunrise



Yukon Sunrise



Yukon Sunrise



for D.W.B.C.

Going on a lion hunt

for wind ensemble

Instrumentation:

Piccolo
Flutes 1, 2, 3
(3rd doubling alto flute)
Oboe
Cor anglais
Clarinet in E♭
Clarinets in B♭ 1, 2, 3, 4
Bass Clarinet in B♭
Bassoons 1, 2
Soprano Saxophone
Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone

Trumpets in B♭ 1, 2, 3
Flugelhorn
Horns in F 1, 2, 3, 4
Trombones 1, 2, 3
Bass Trombone
Euphonium
Tuba

Piano
Double Bass

Percussion 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
(3 bass drums, 3 brake drums, snare drum, medium tom-tom, large tom-tom, cymbals, tam-tam, xylophone, marimba, crotales, glockenspiel)

David John Lang

2016

Going on a lion hunt

Program Note:

Going on a lion hunt.
Going to catch a big one.
I'm not scared.

Oh no! A swamp!
Can't go over it, can't go under it…
Have to go through it…

This well-known chant-along story was a favourite of mine growing up. As kids, we used to act it out at night time, trooping through the house encountering different obstacles in each room, before finally reaching the back window and seeing the 'lion': a distant treetop illumined by a yellow streetlight which somehow managed to terrify us.

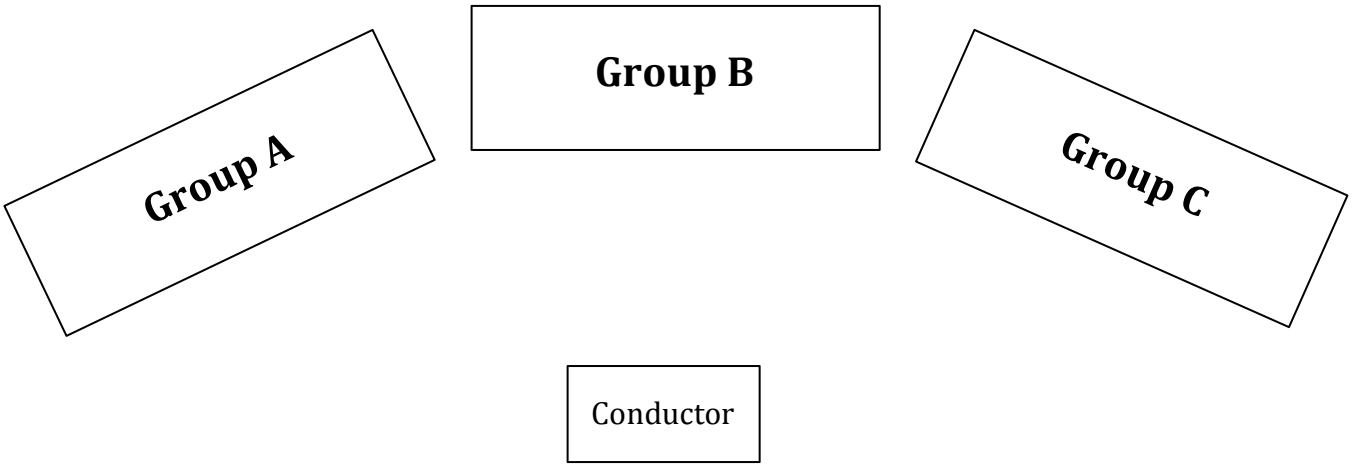
The story has grown on me. I love how the goal of the adventure – the lion (or bear in some versions) – is actually something scary and confronting. Yet you really have to want it, because at each stage of the journey there is a good reason for turning back. A muddy swamp, long grass, a river, a dark cave...

I wrote this piece as a prayer for a friend who was in one of life's dark places. It was a prayer for him to have the courage and perseverance needed for the lion hunt, to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

That's why this music sounds so relentlessly determined. There is no stopping. There is no turning to the side. There is no turning back. There is only the onwards journey. A fight for life.

Performance Notes:

The wind orchestra is divided into three groups as indicated in the score. These groups should be positioned as follows:



While the groups should be spatially distinct from one another, there is no need for them to be separated by large distances. Much will depend on the venue – if you have adequate spaces to the sides of the audience, feel free to use them for groups A and C, but is anticipated that in most cases the three groups will be positioned more or less in front of the audience, spaced across the stage as shown above.

One player per part is intended, but the nature of the music allows for doubling of some parts. Three bass drums are called for – the best quality bass drum should be in Group C. These bass drums must make a deep yet distinctly articulate sound, not too 'boomy' – they will probably need to be muffled slightly. Three brake drums are called for – these can be substituted with anything else that makes a hard metallic clanging sound.

A successful performance of this piece should be frightening. The persistent repetitiveness should sound unsettling and confronting. The intensity must never waver, even in the quieter sections. Confidence and accuracy of rhythm is essential. Double-tongued semiquavers near the end of the work may be played as single-tongued quavers (ie, the first note of each pair) by some players if necessary.

transposed score

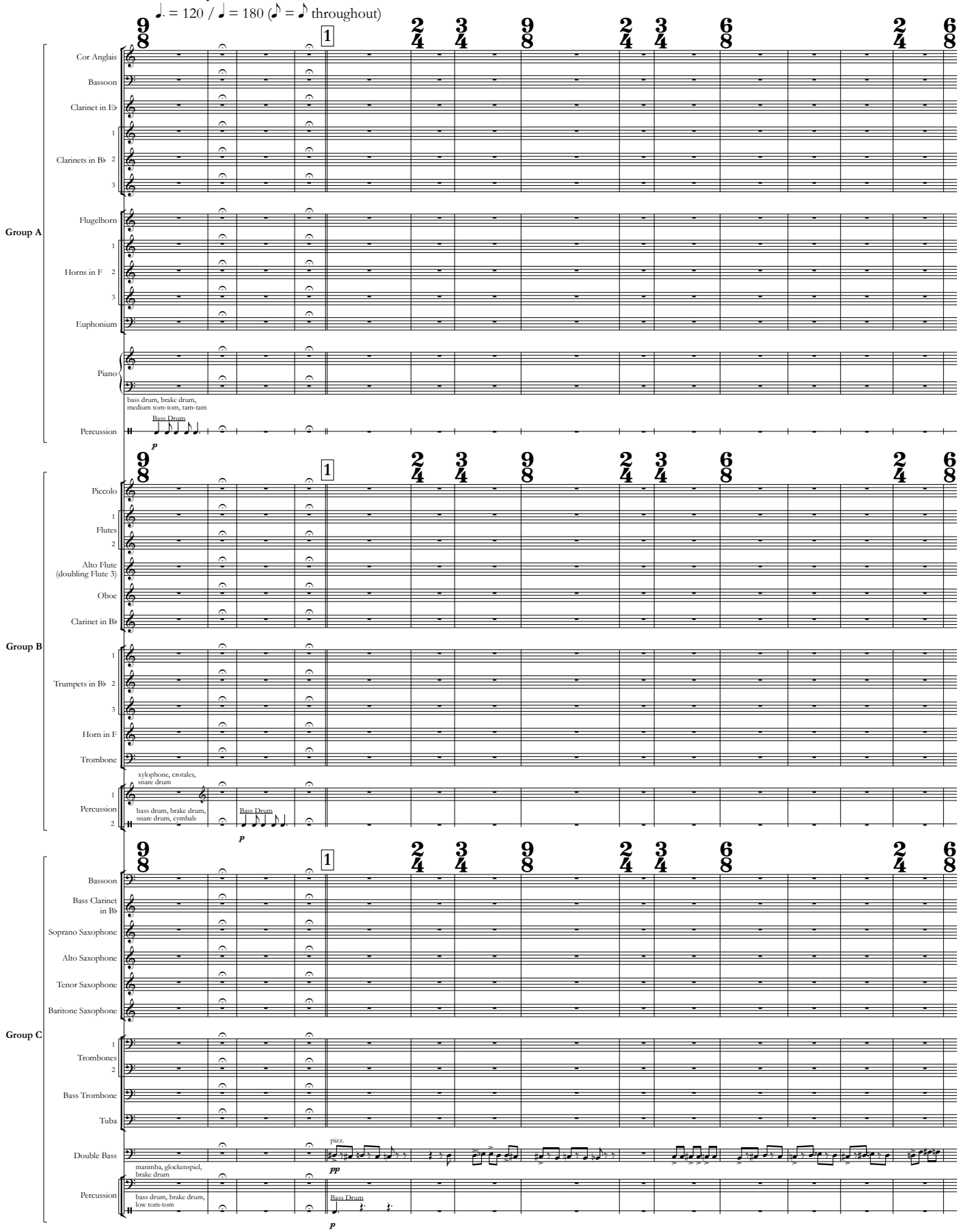
for D.W.B.C.

Going on a Lion Hunt

David John Lang

Intensely focused and determined

♩. = 120 / ♩ = 180 (♪ = ♪ throughout)



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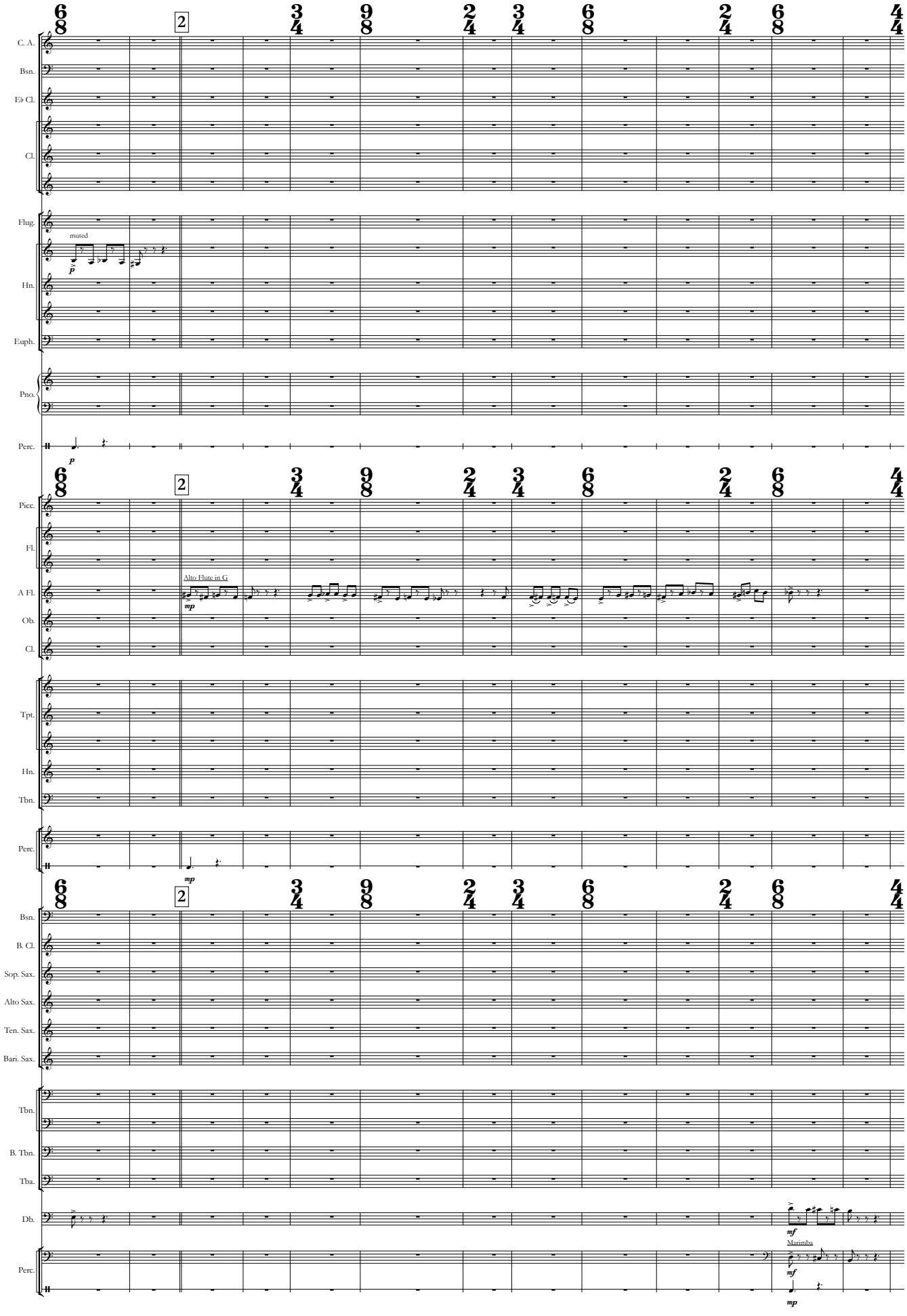

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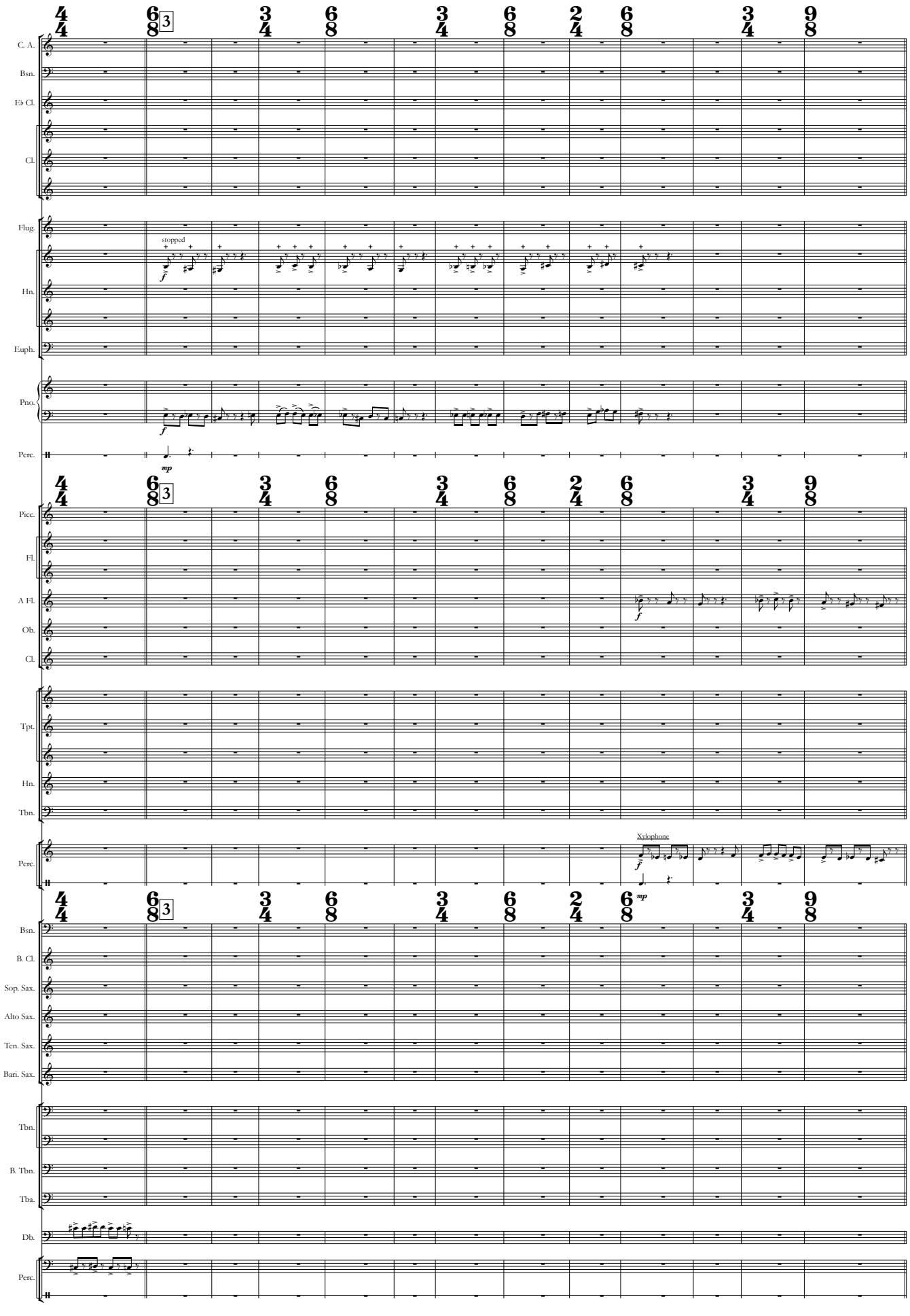

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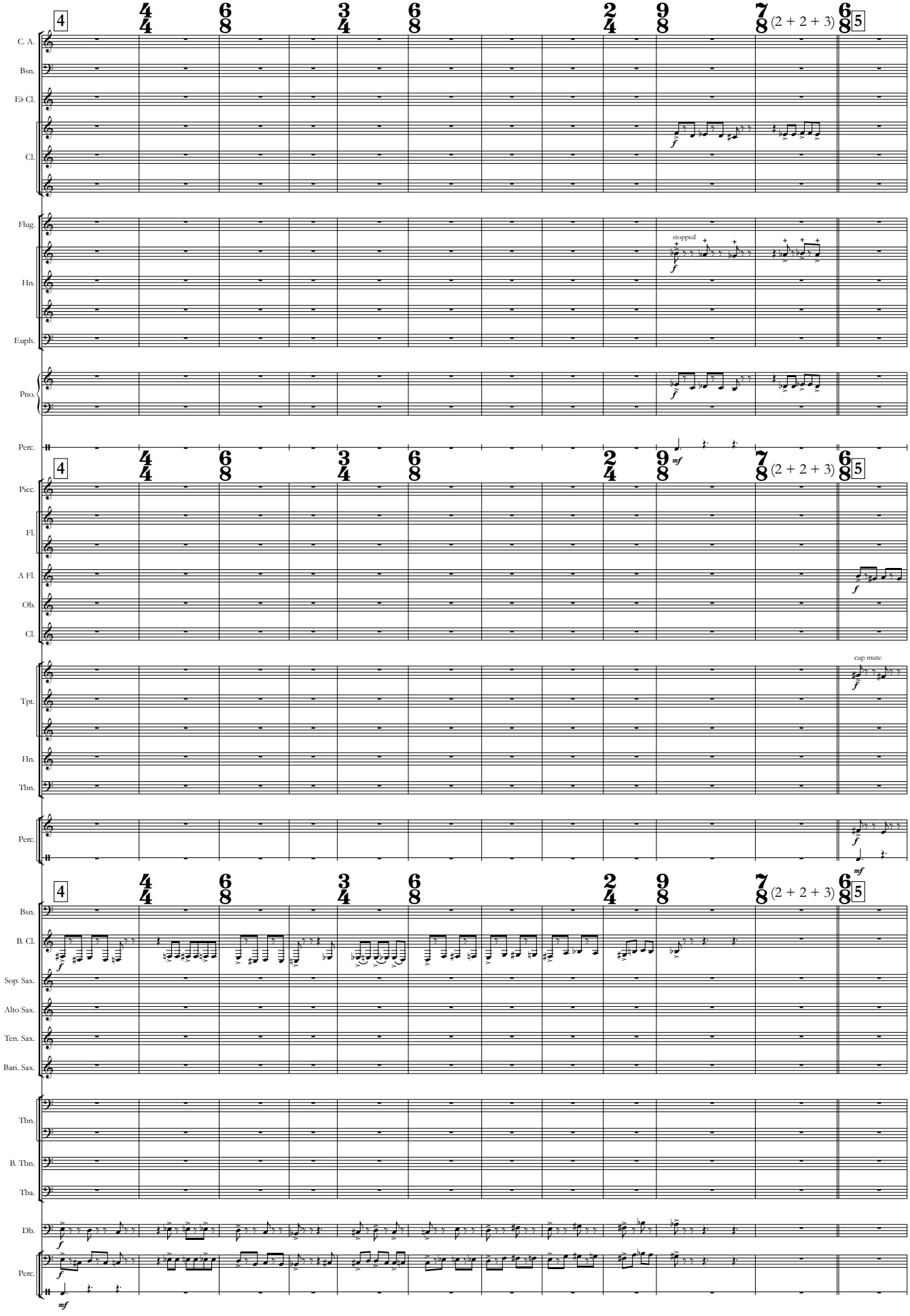

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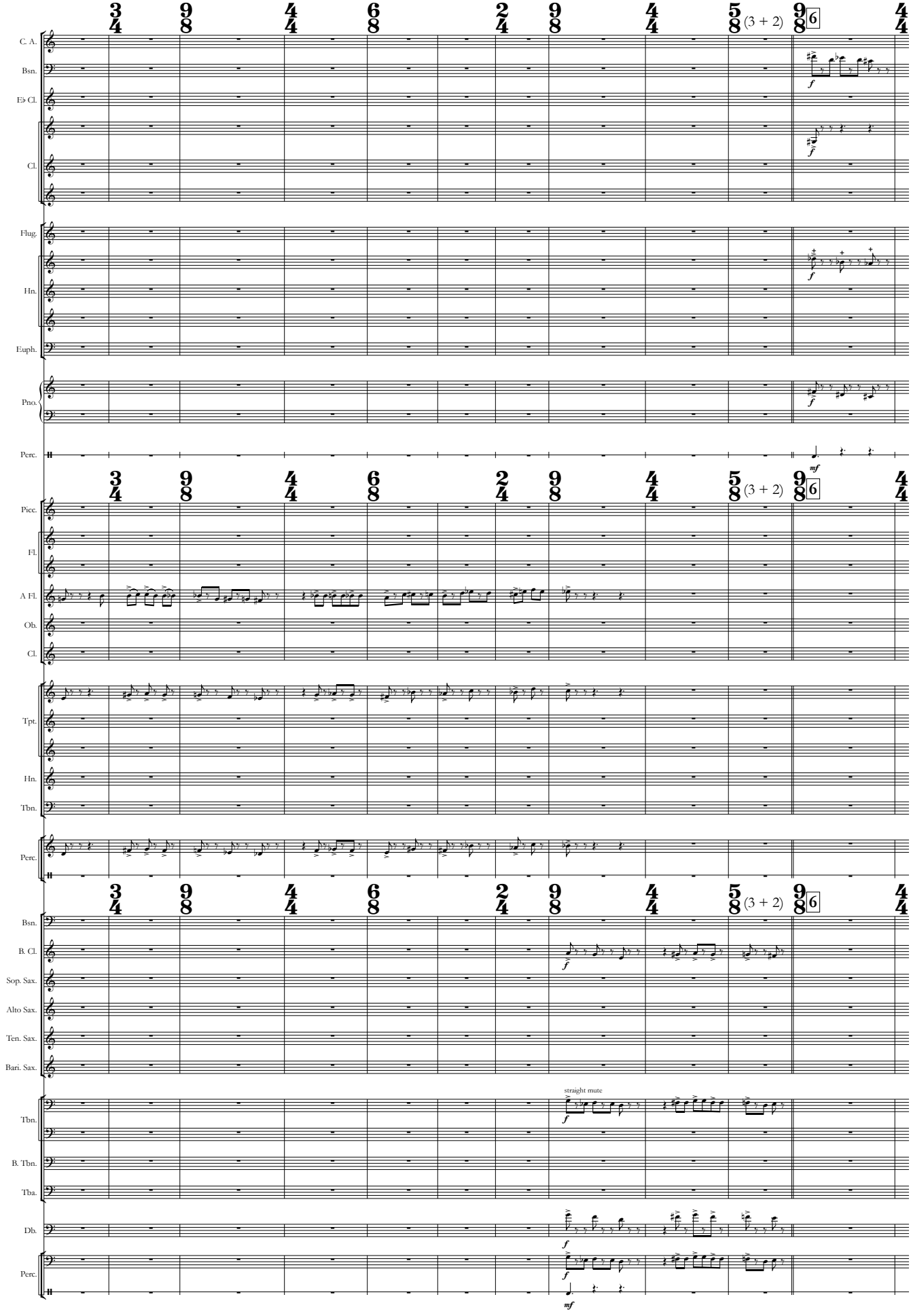

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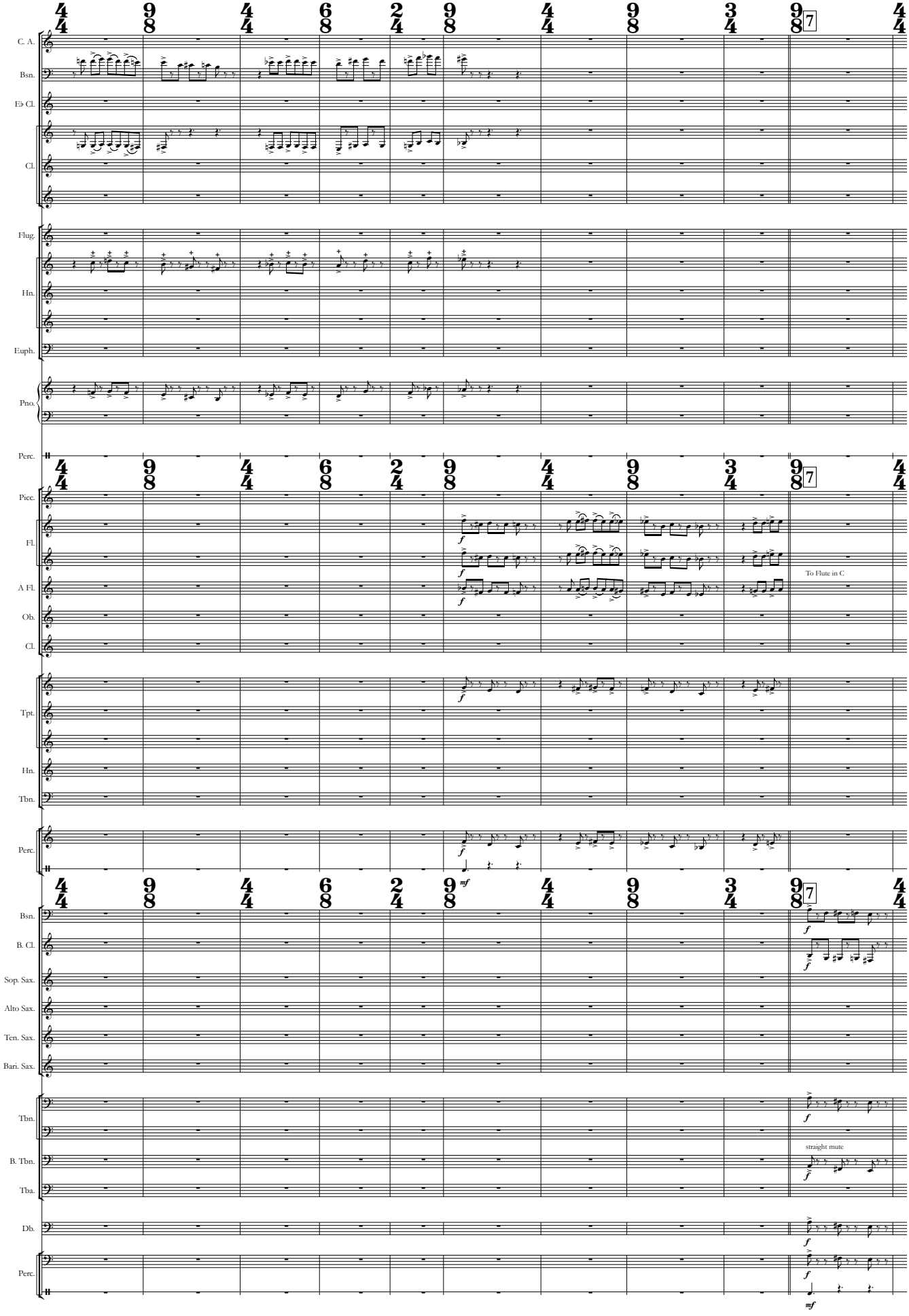

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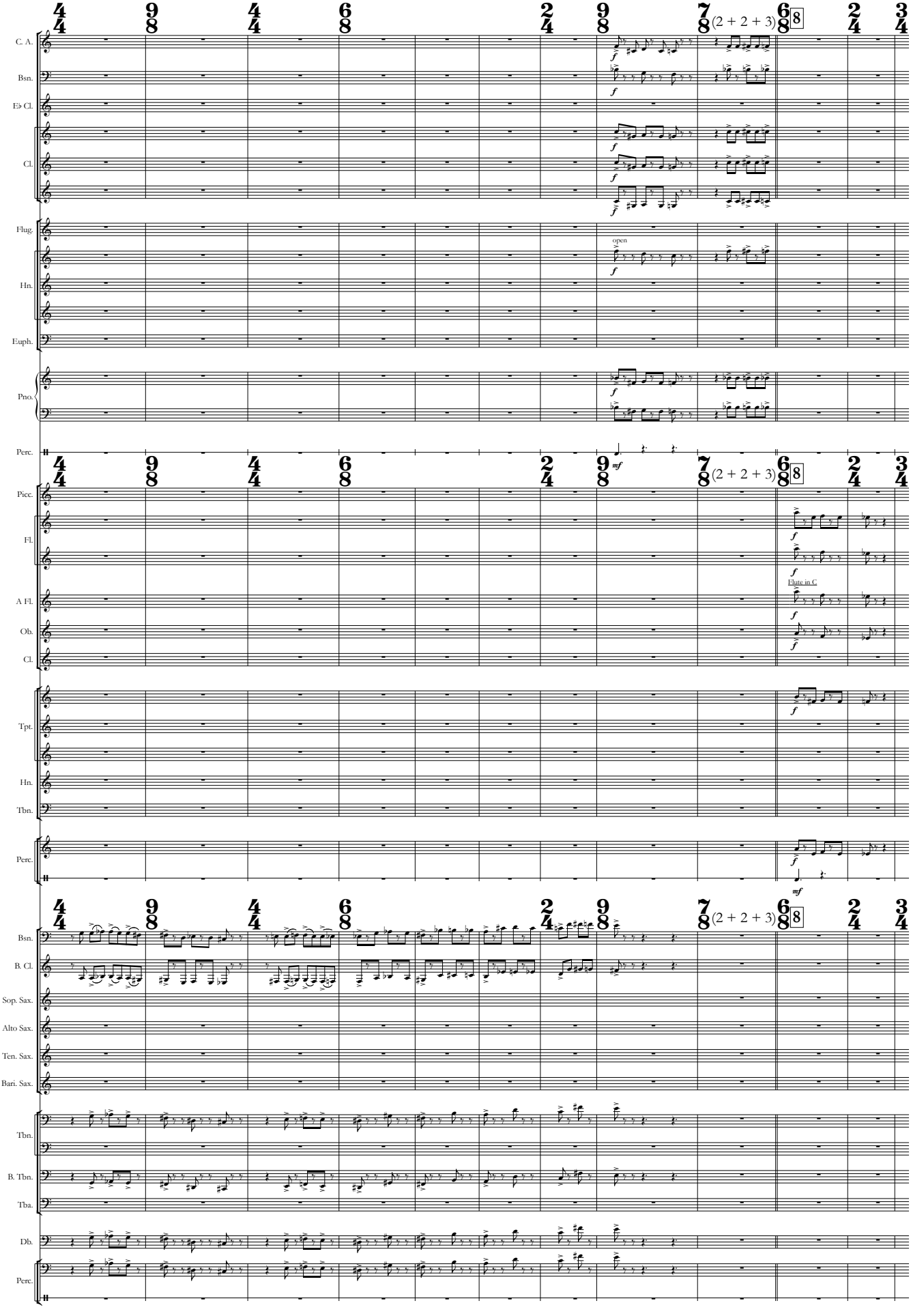

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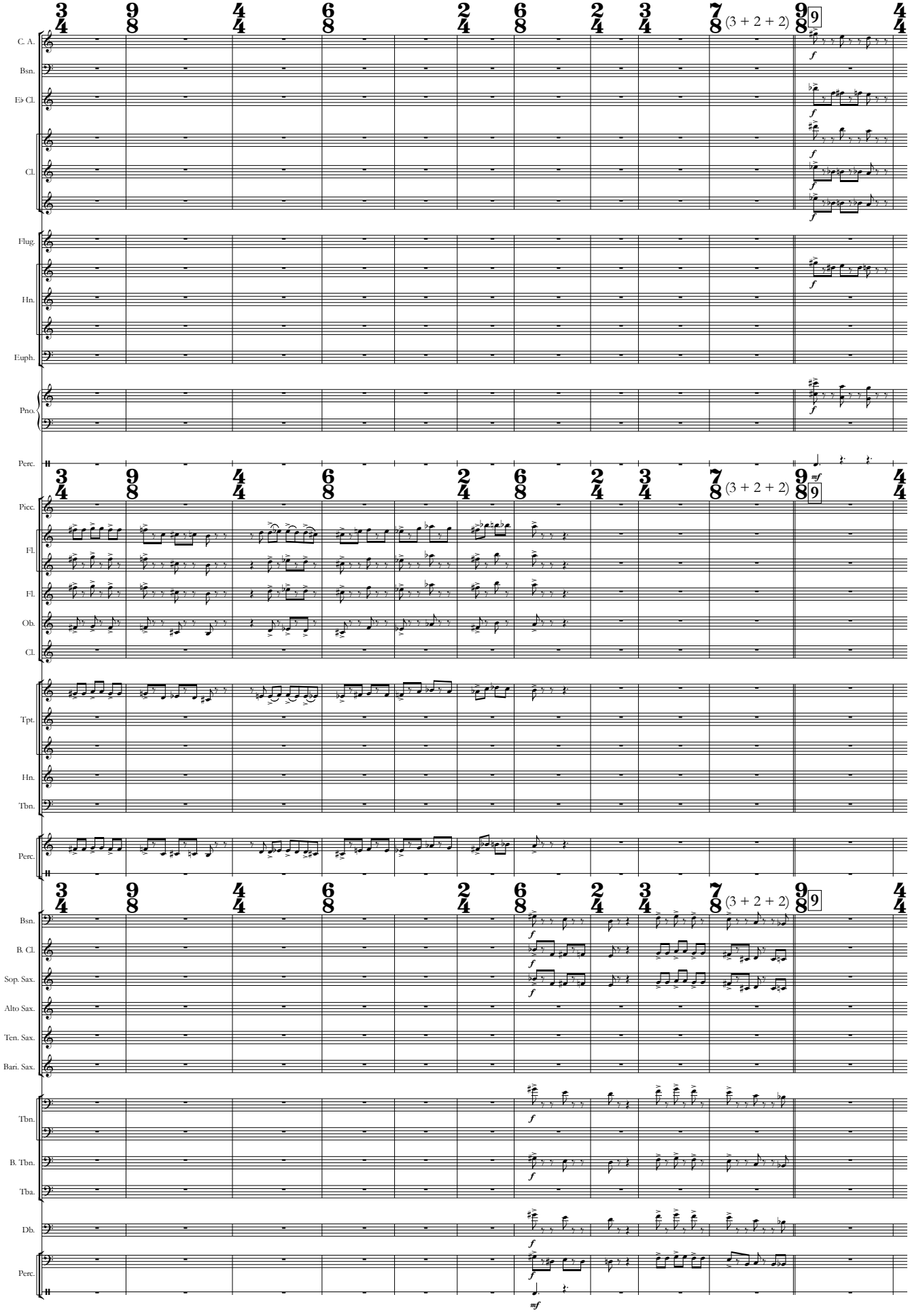

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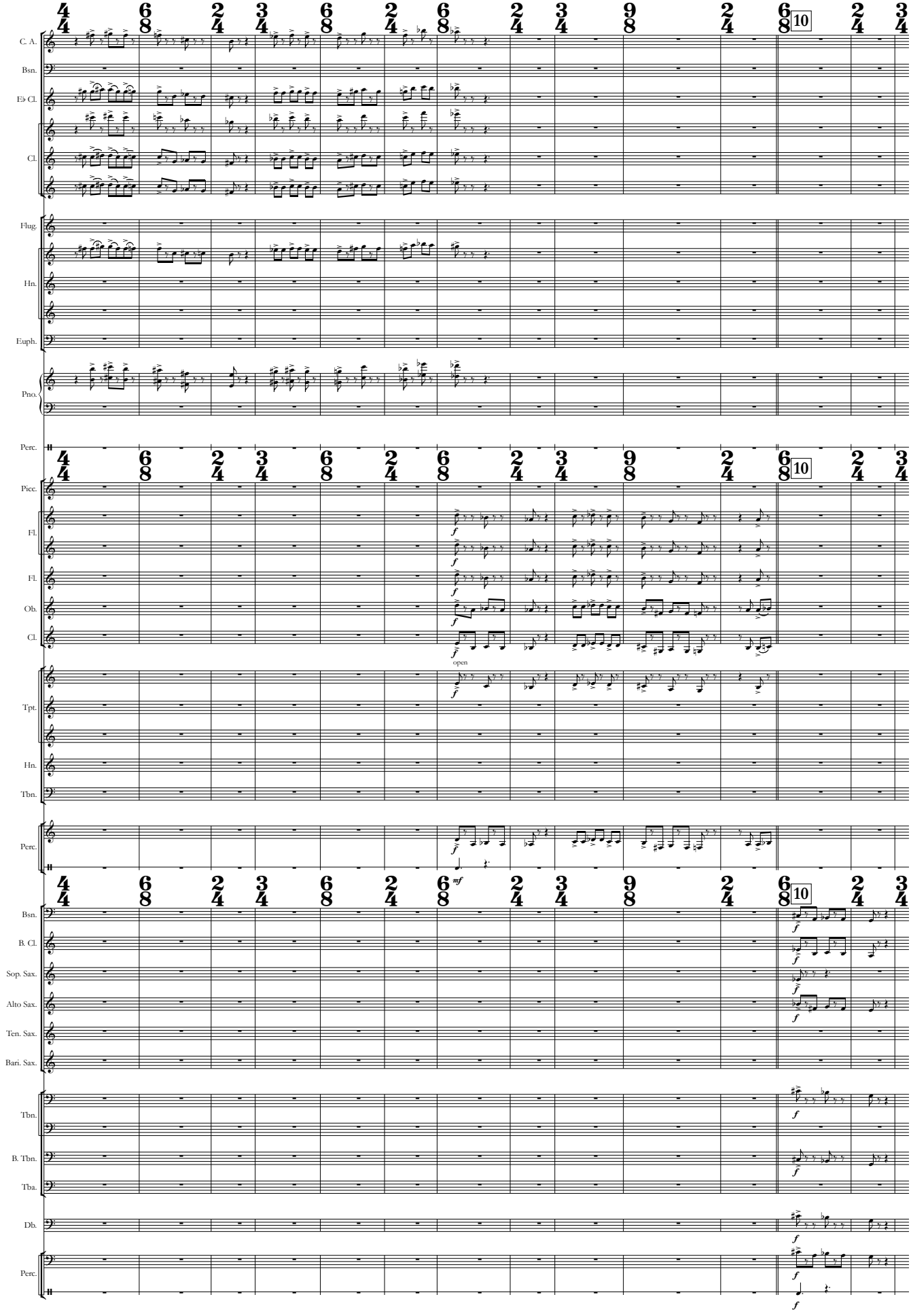

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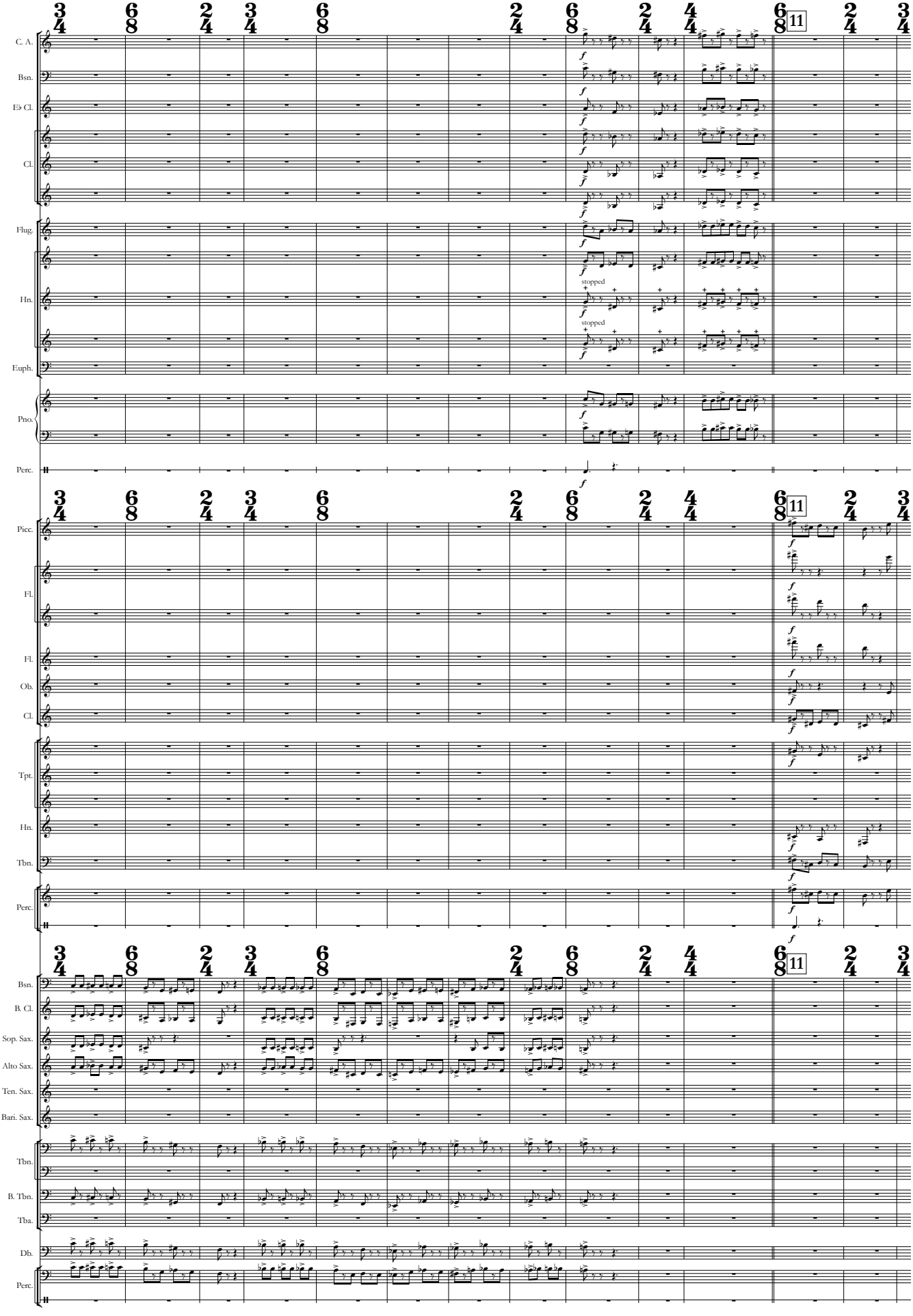

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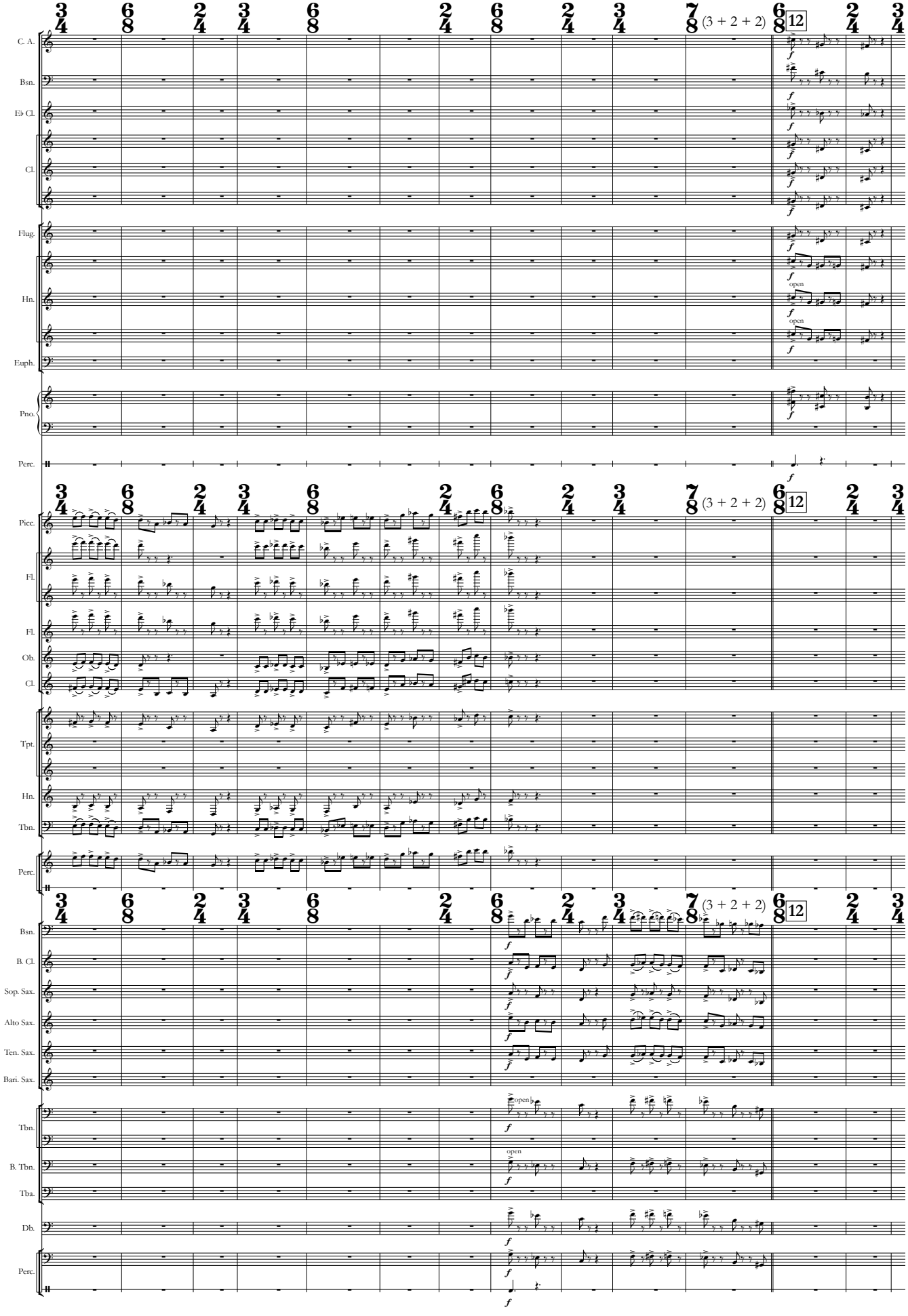

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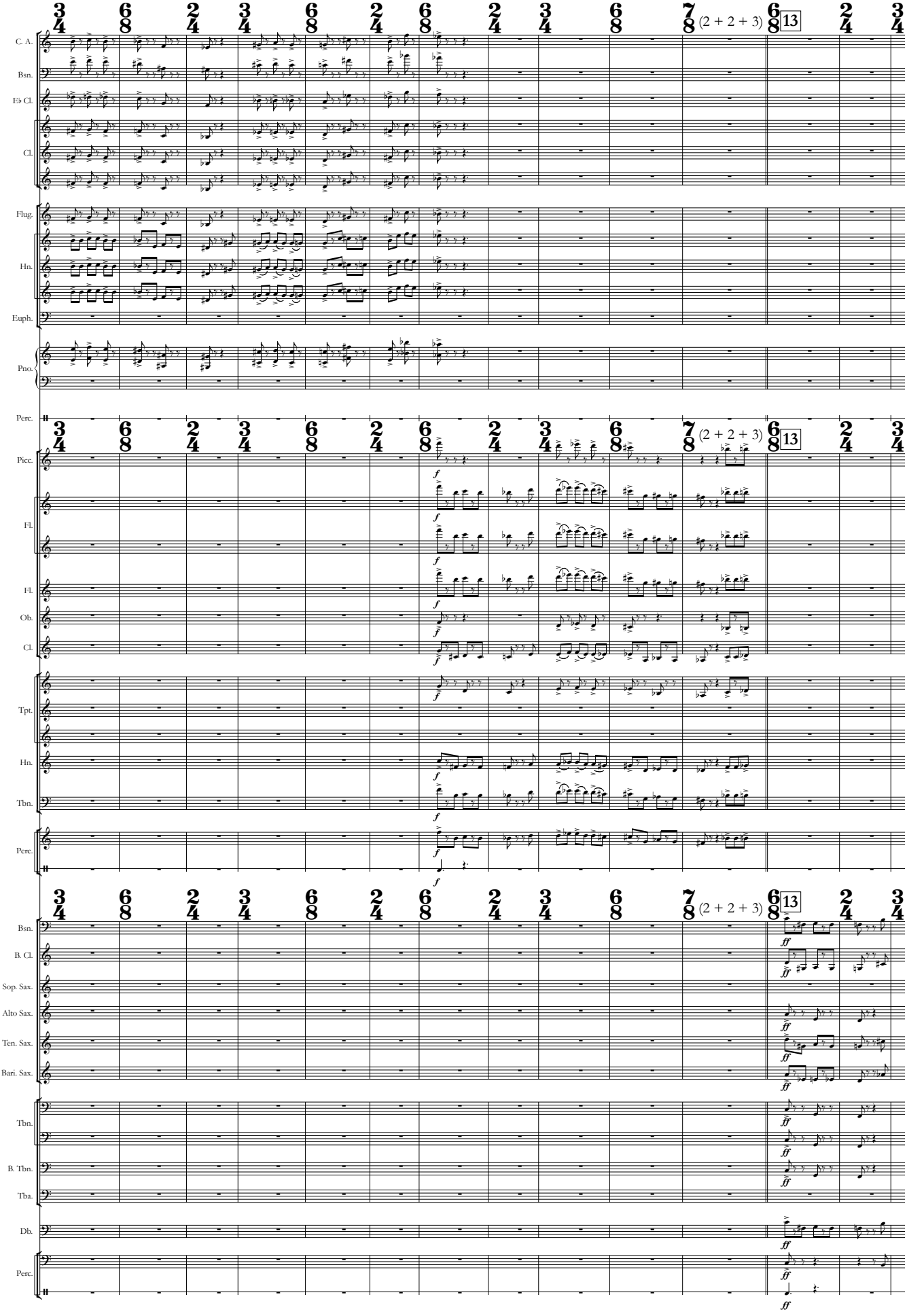

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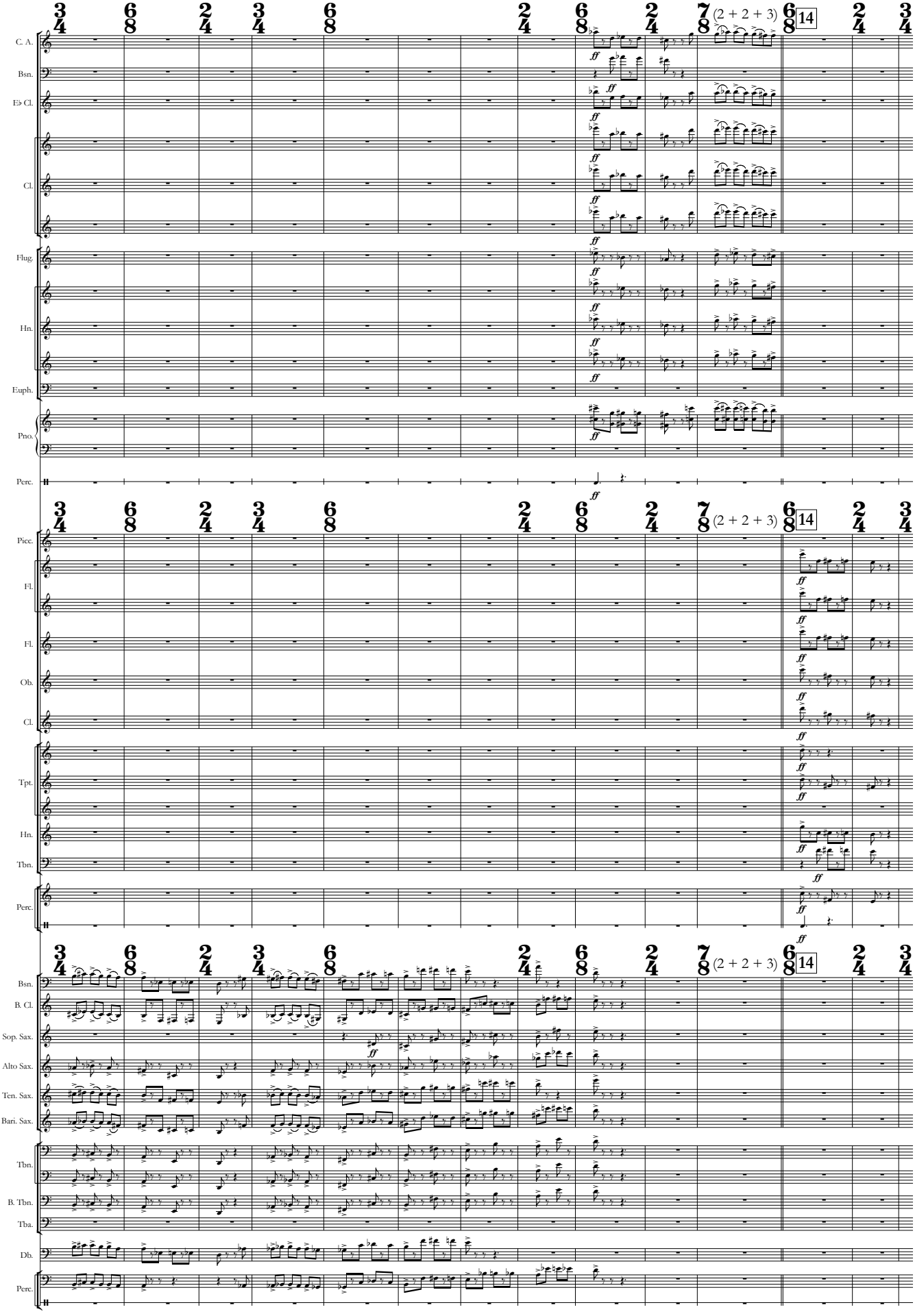

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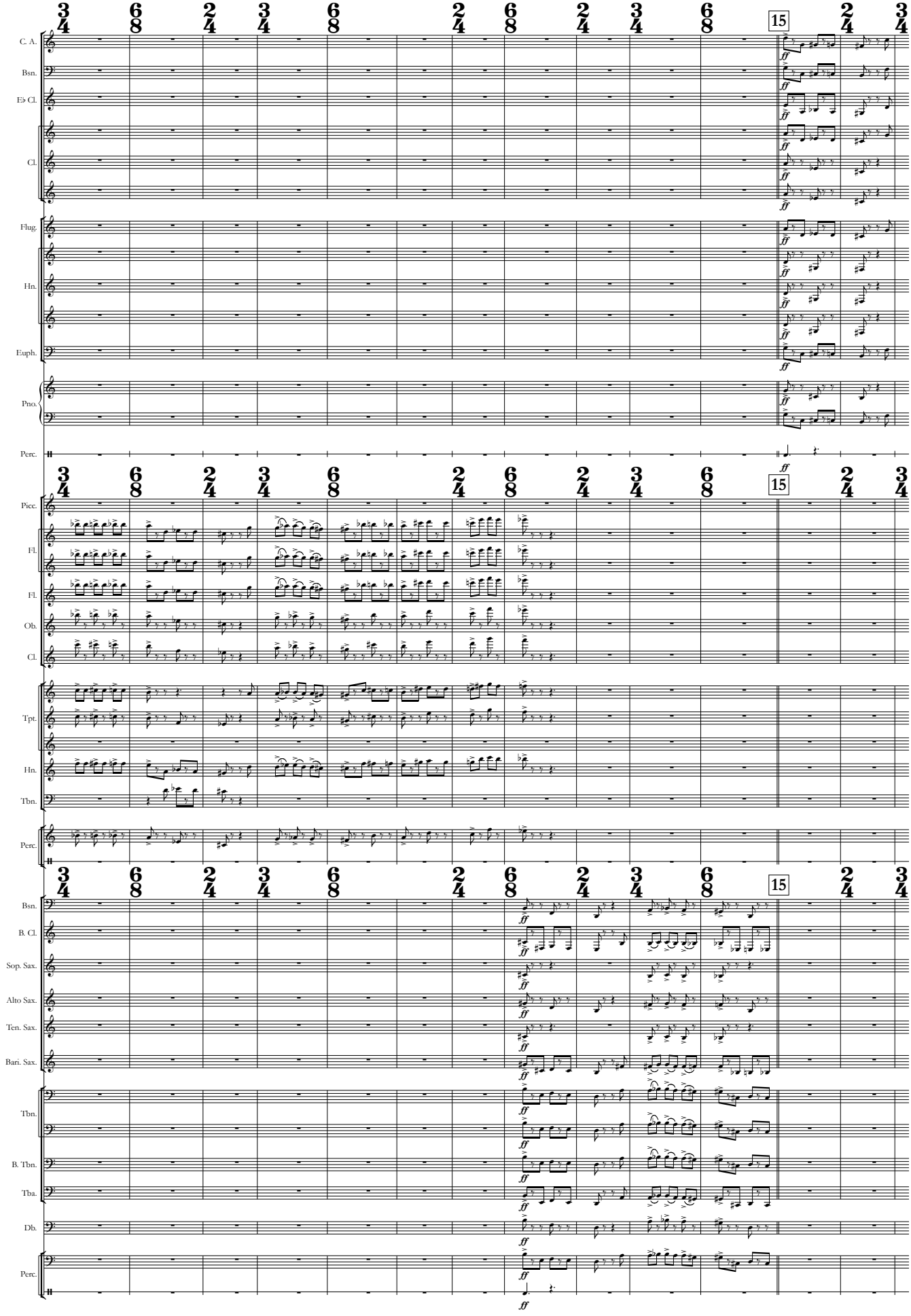
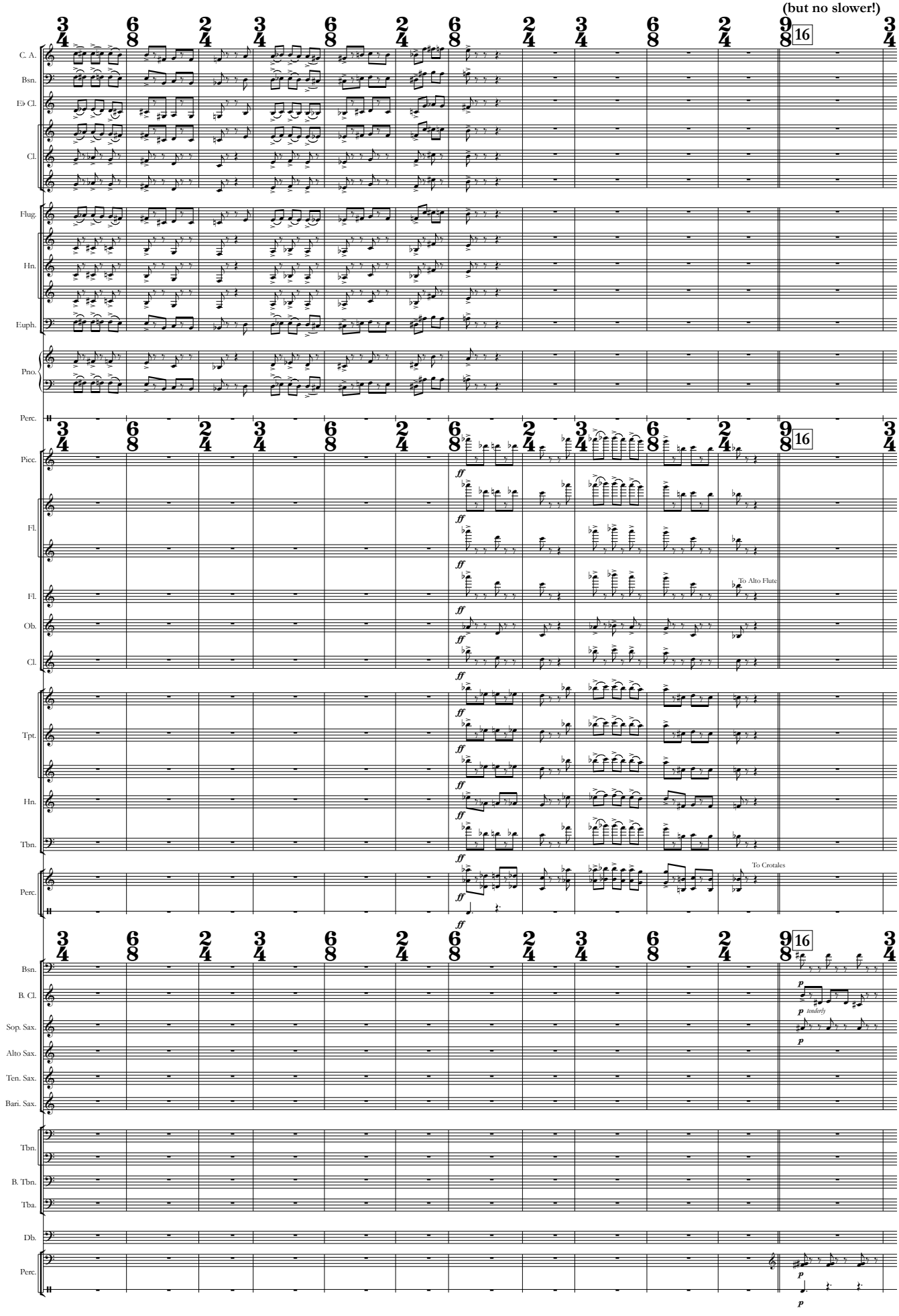


Going on a Lion Hunt

Gentle, tender (but no slower!)



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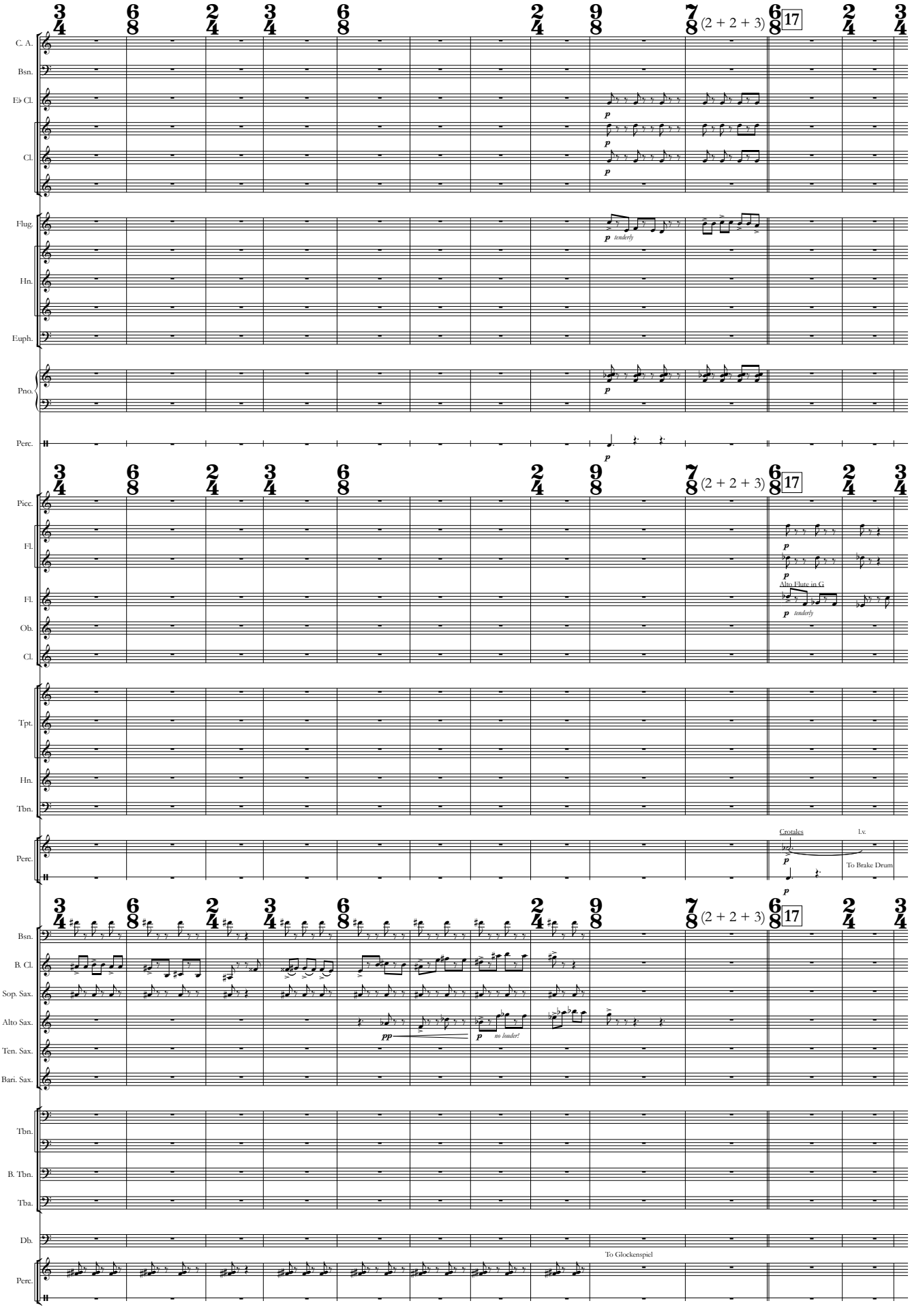

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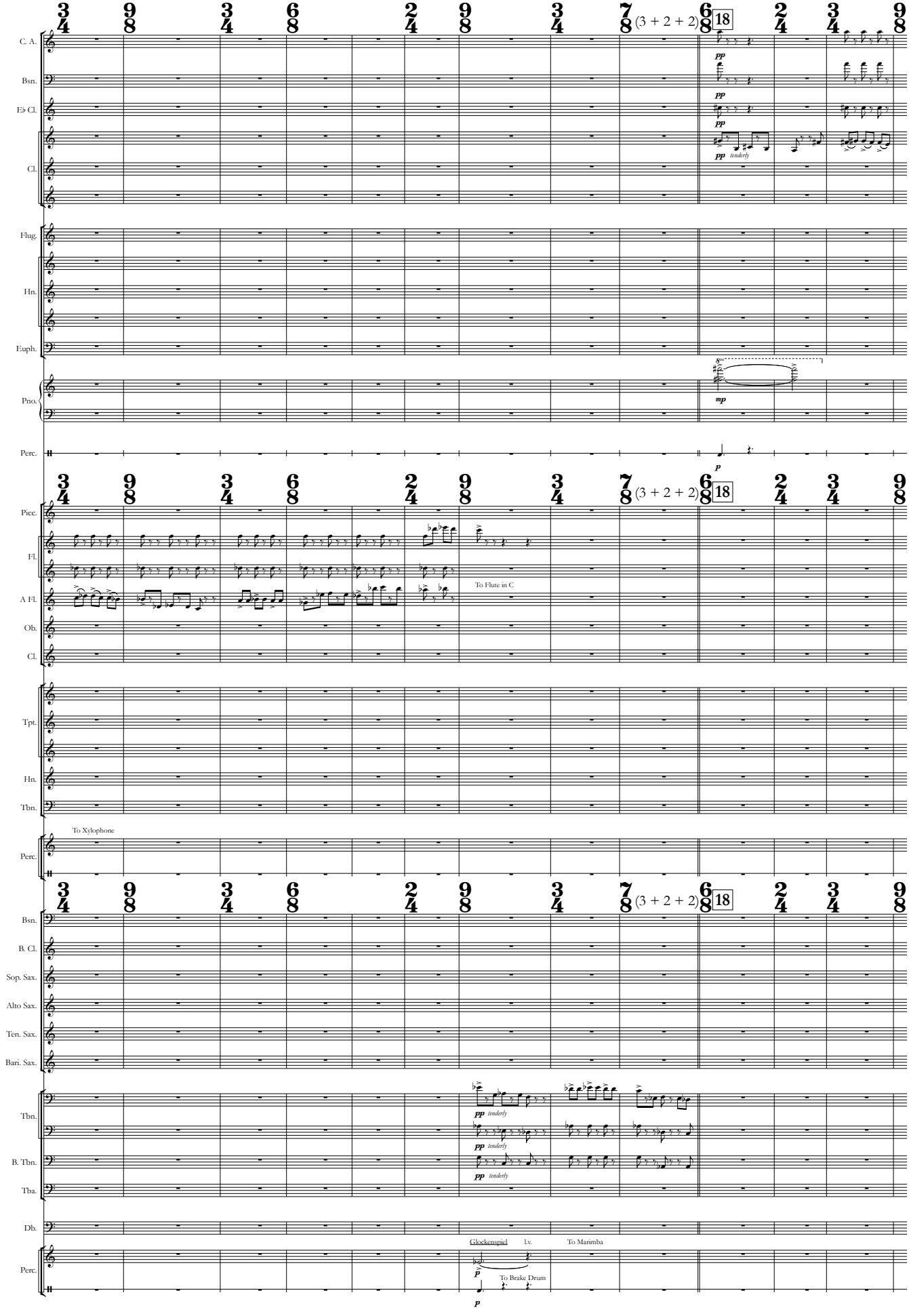
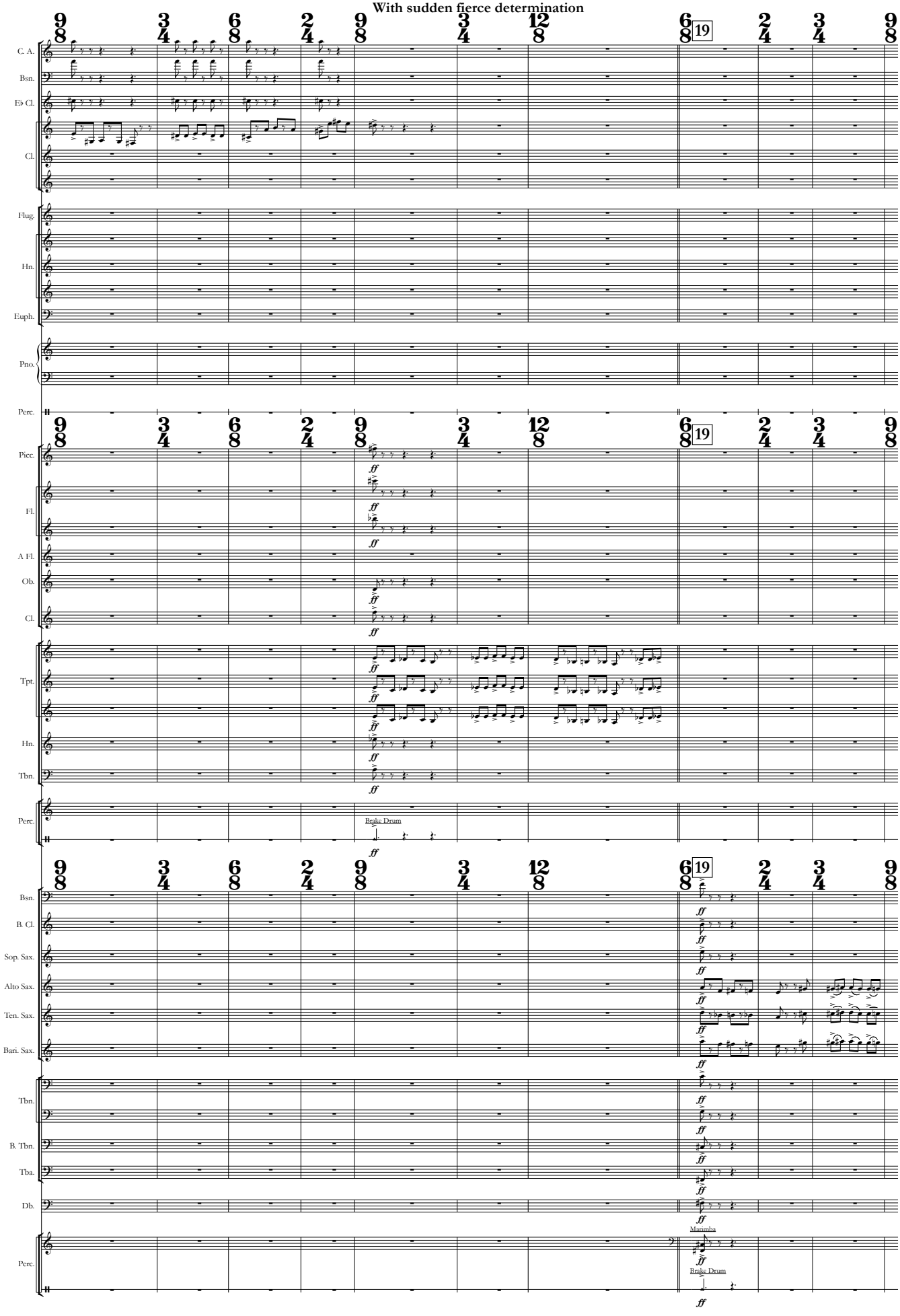


Going on a Lion Hunt

With sudden fierce determination



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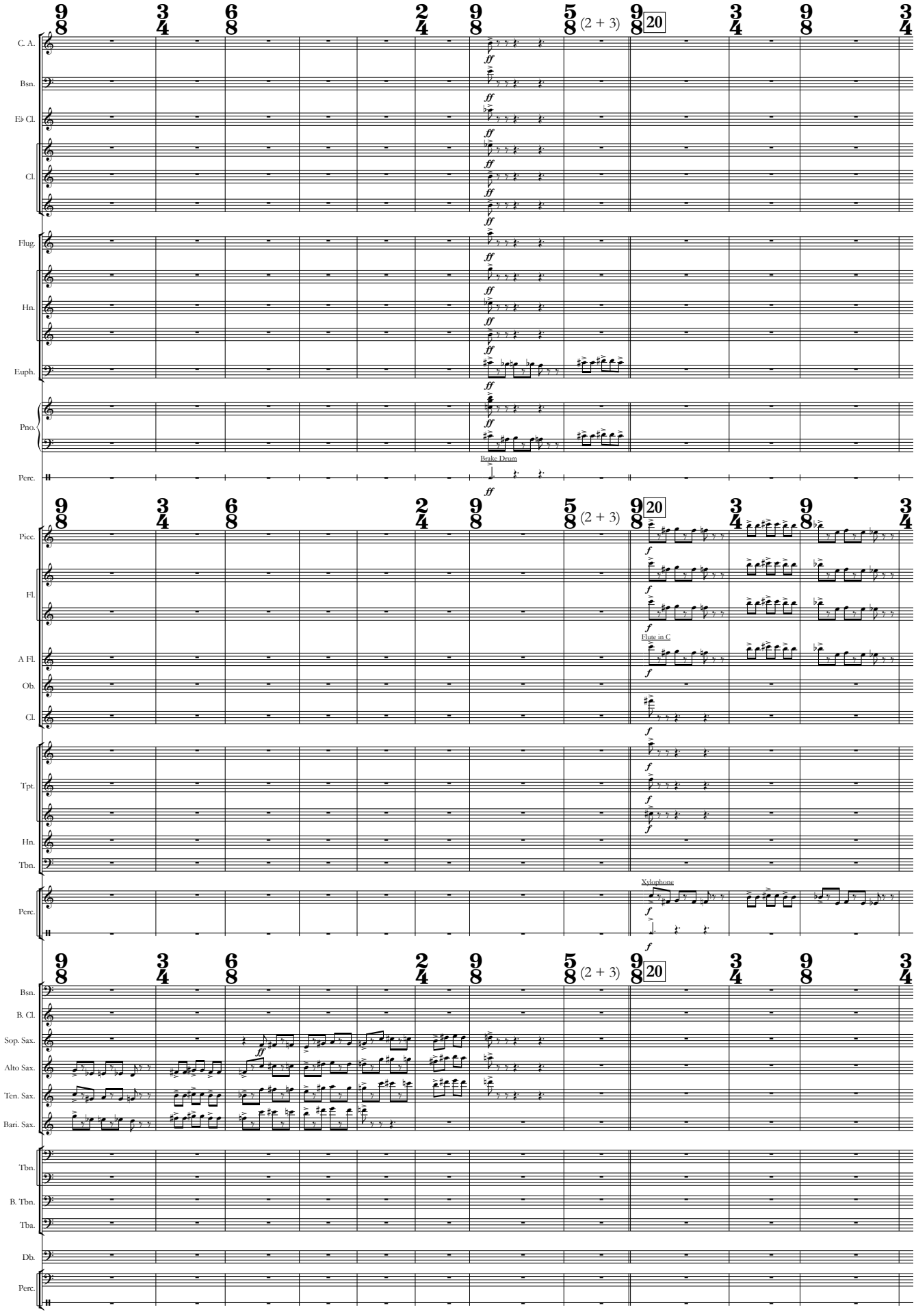

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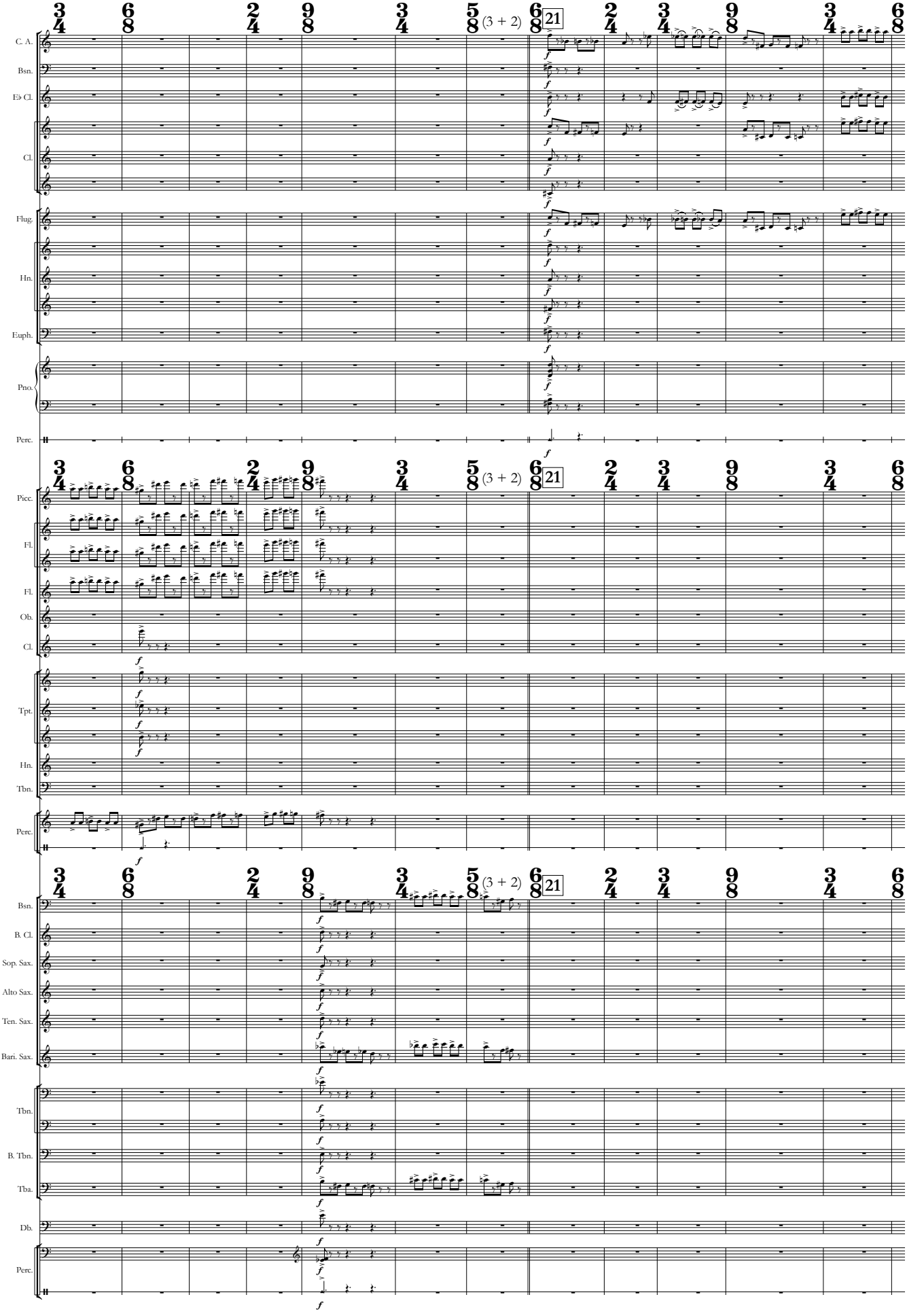

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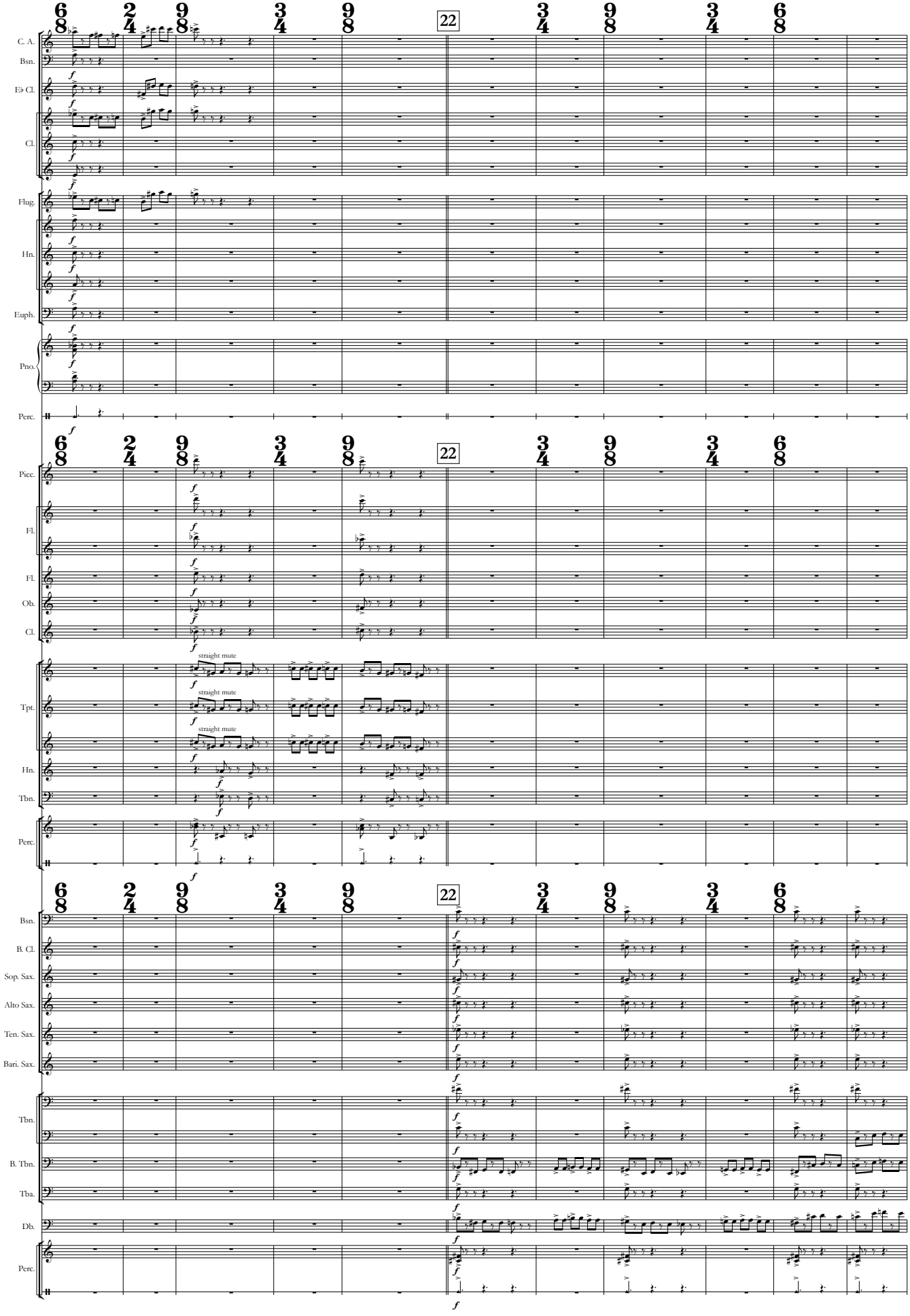

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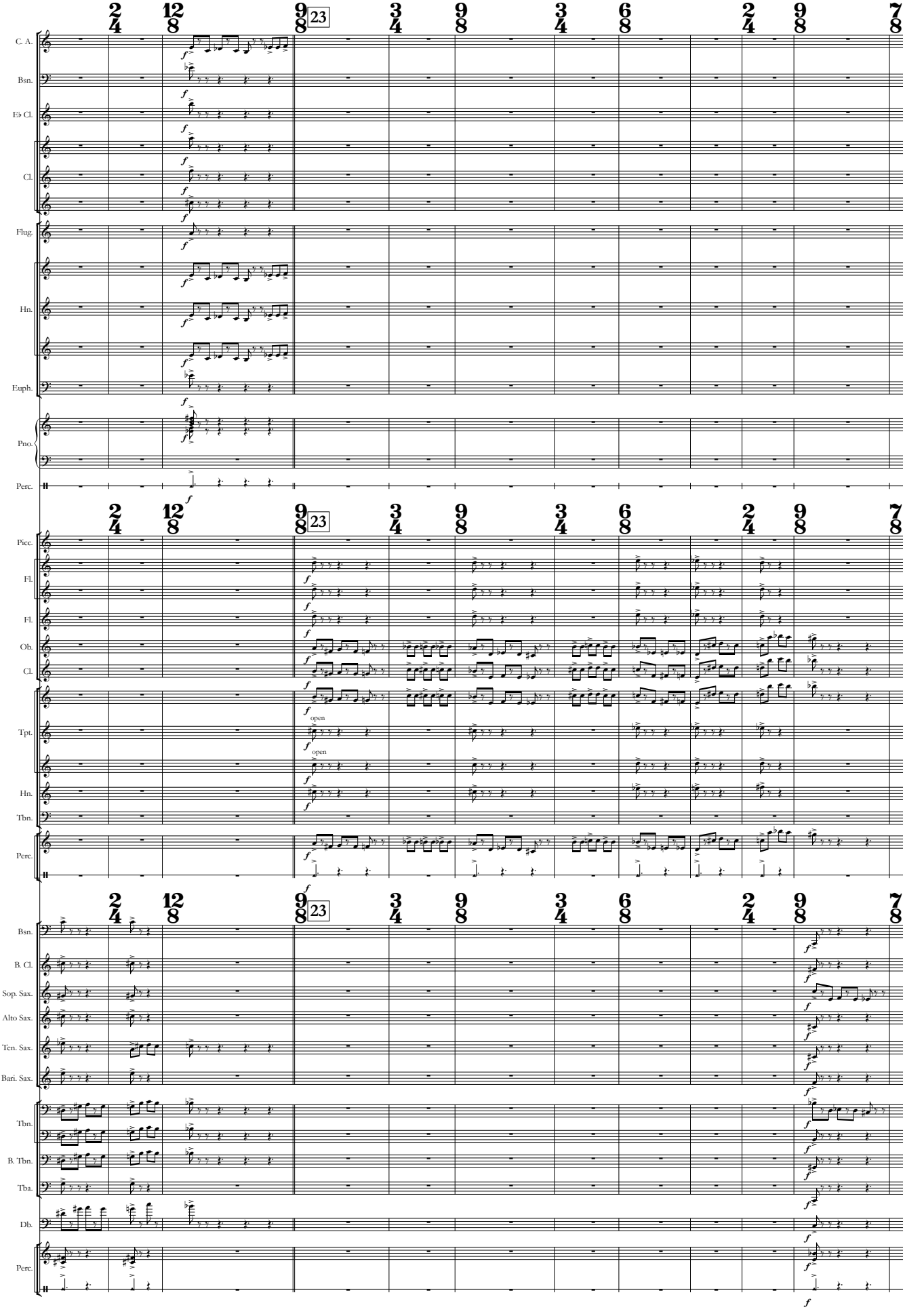

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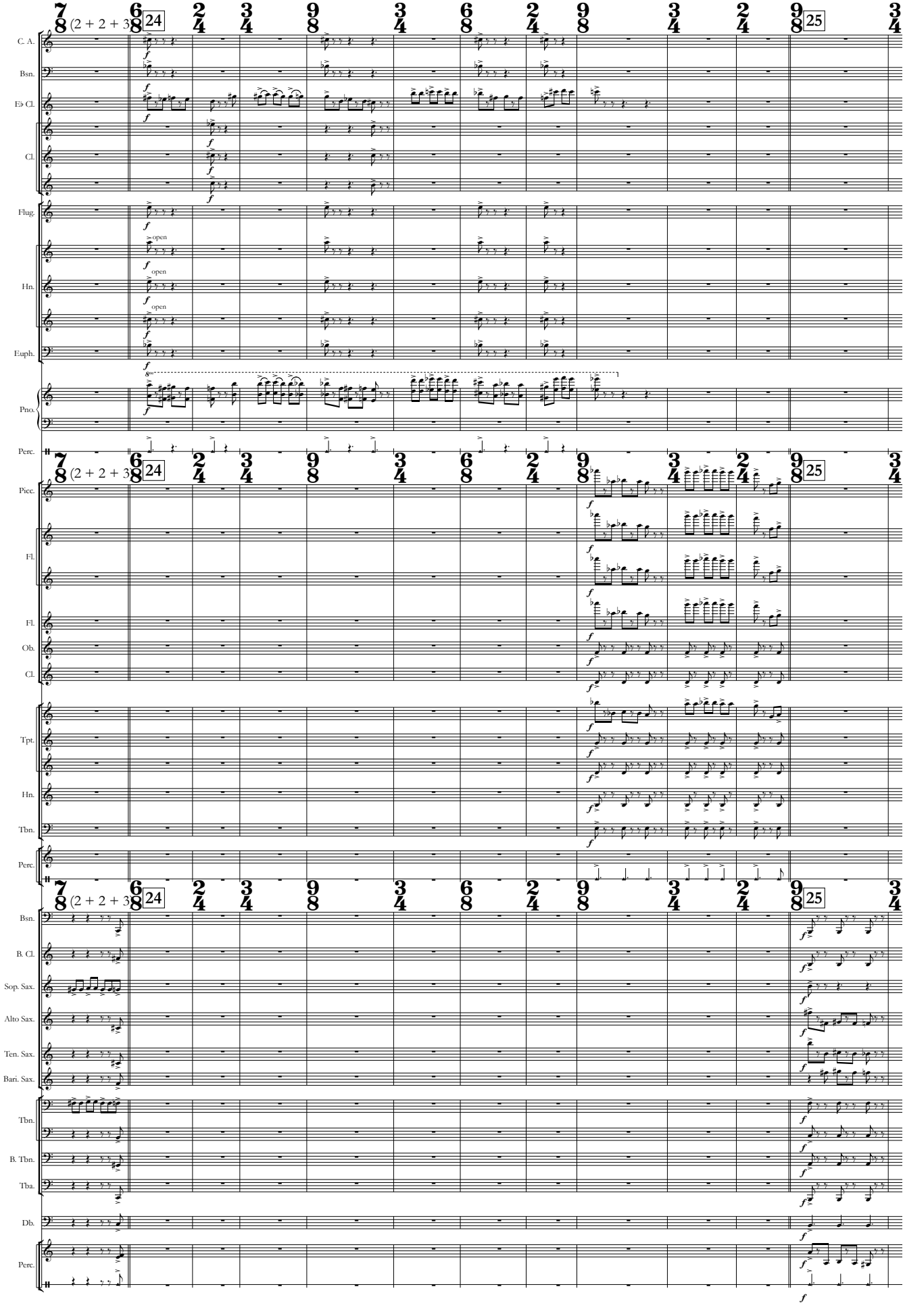

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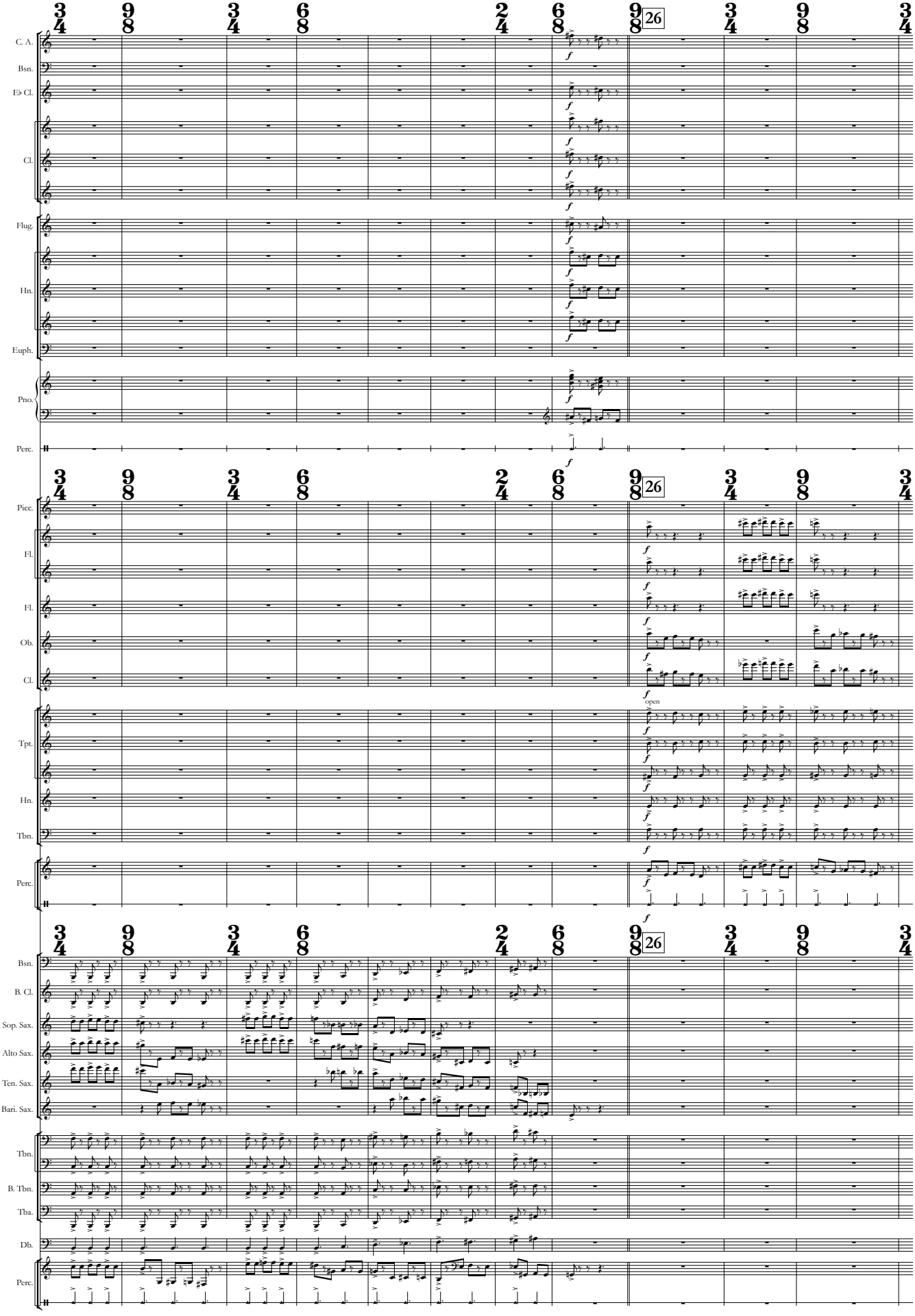

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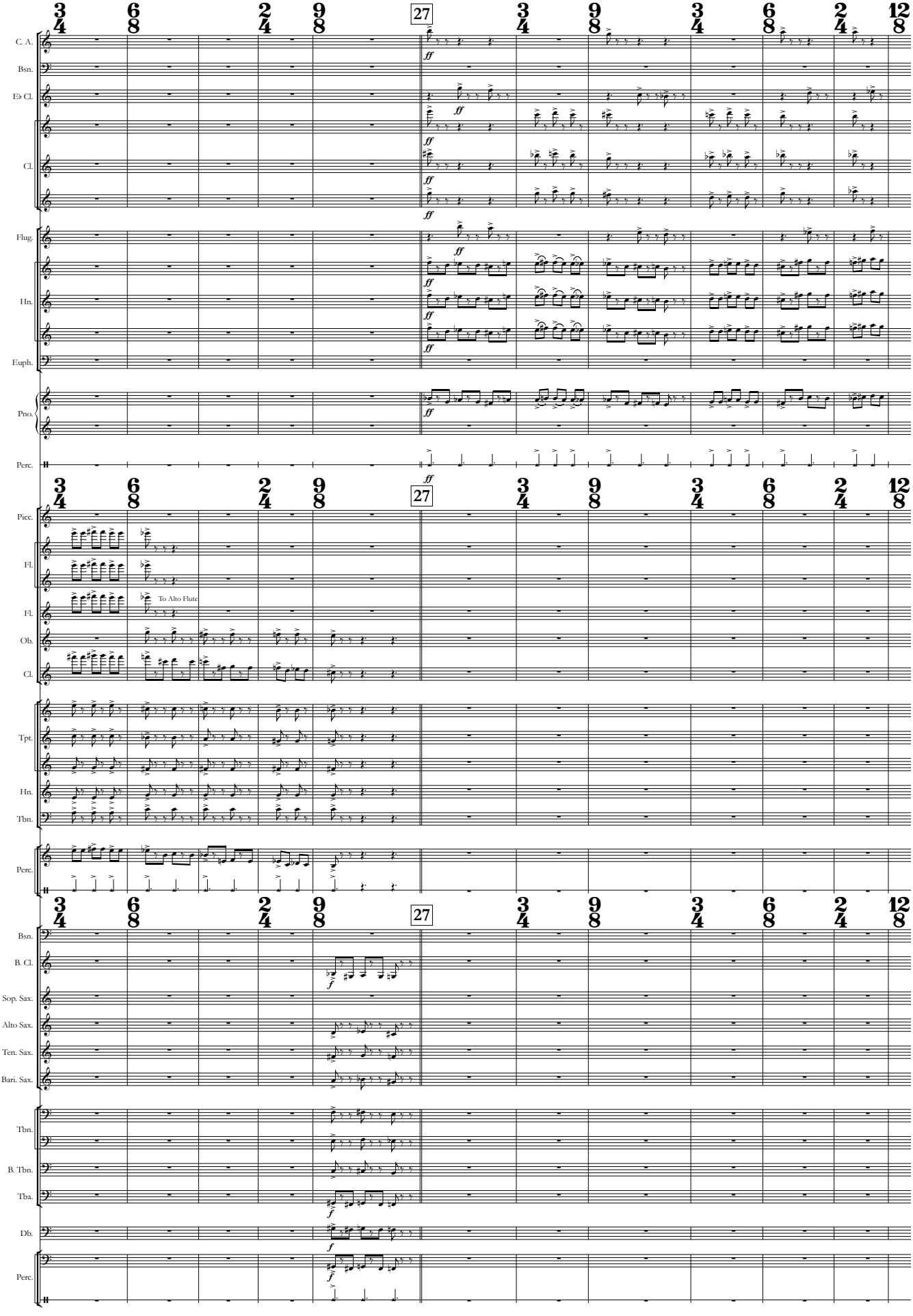

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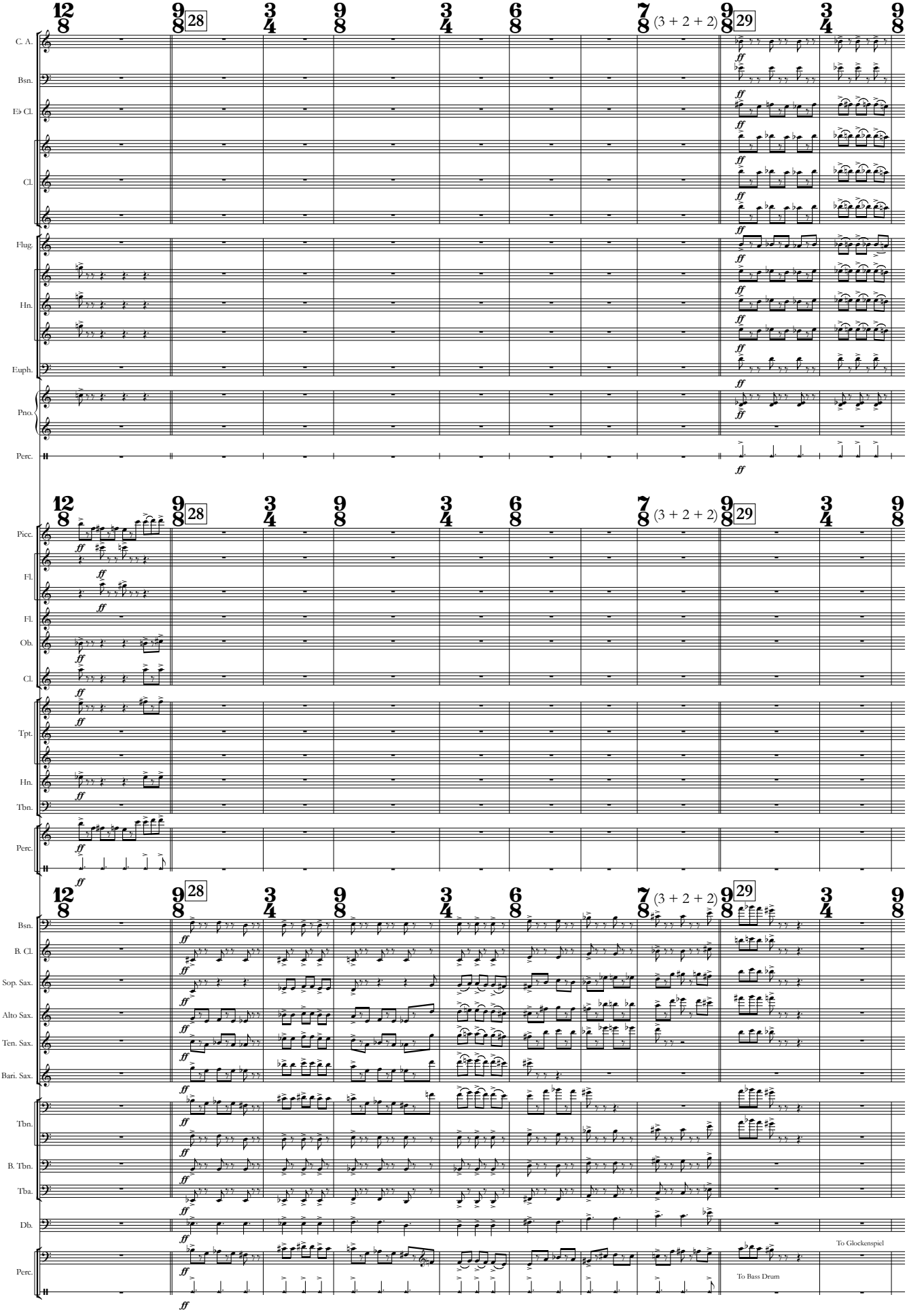
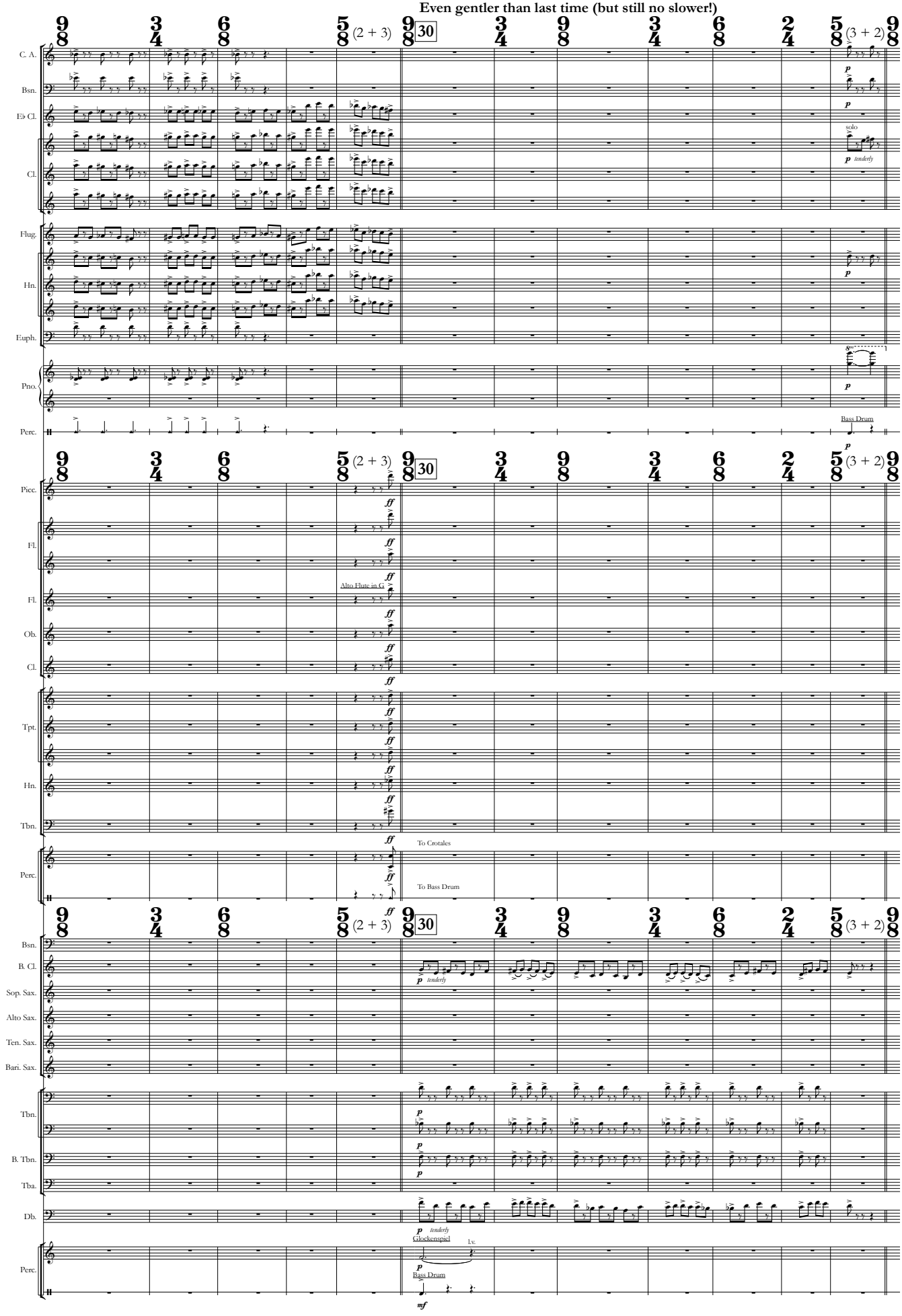


Going on a Lion Hunt

Even gentler than last time (but still no slower!)



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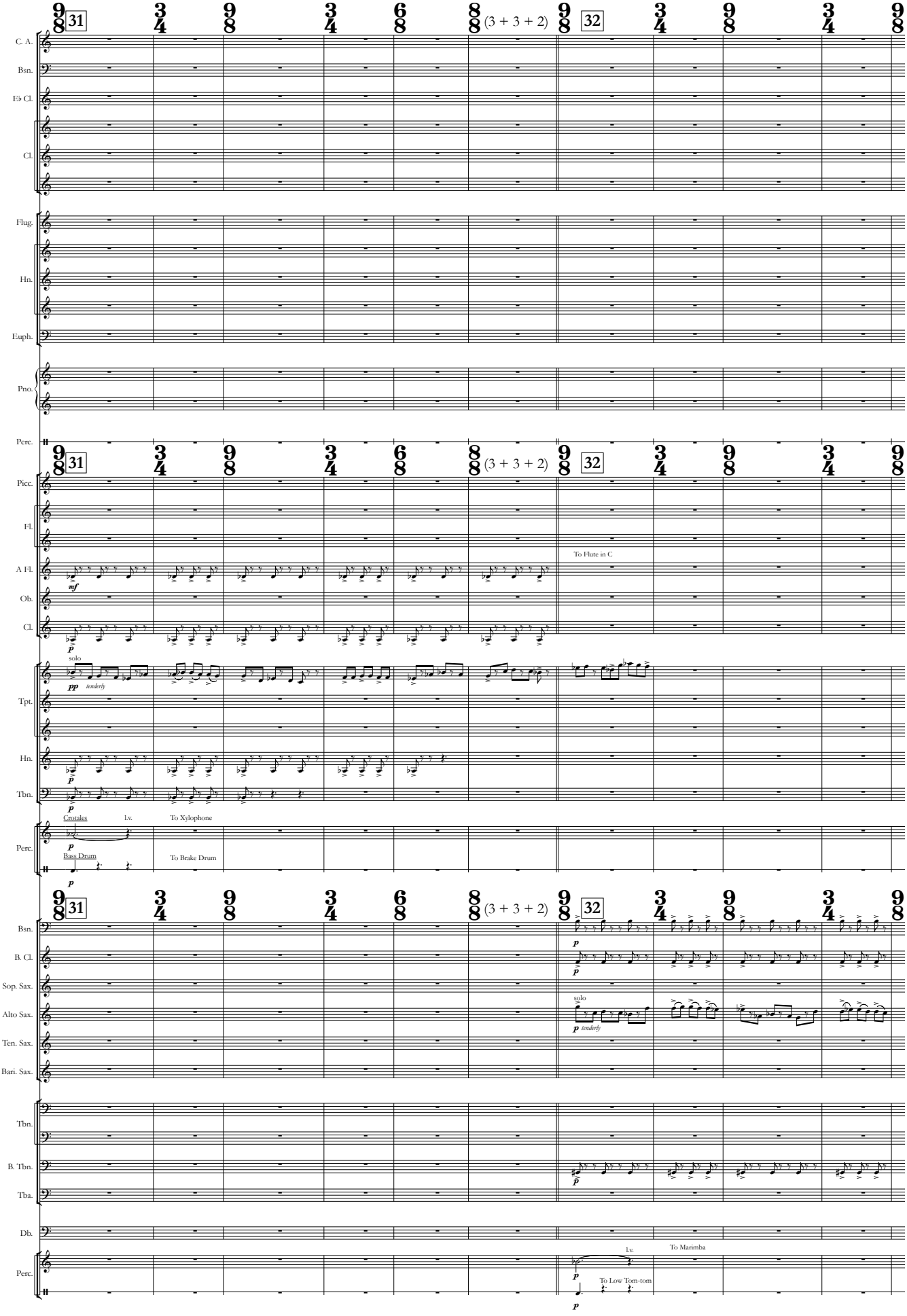
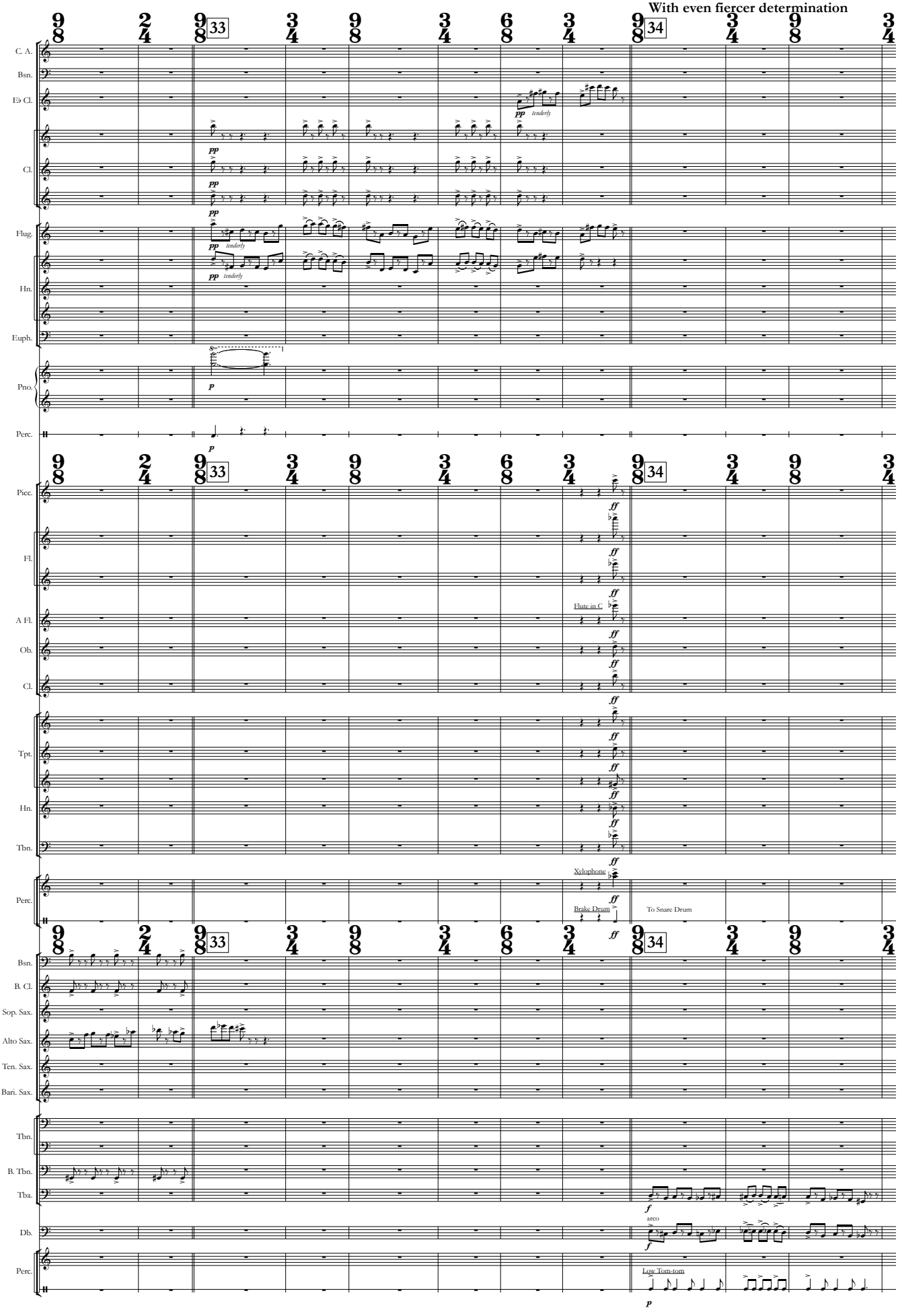


Going on a Lion Hunt

With even fiercer determination



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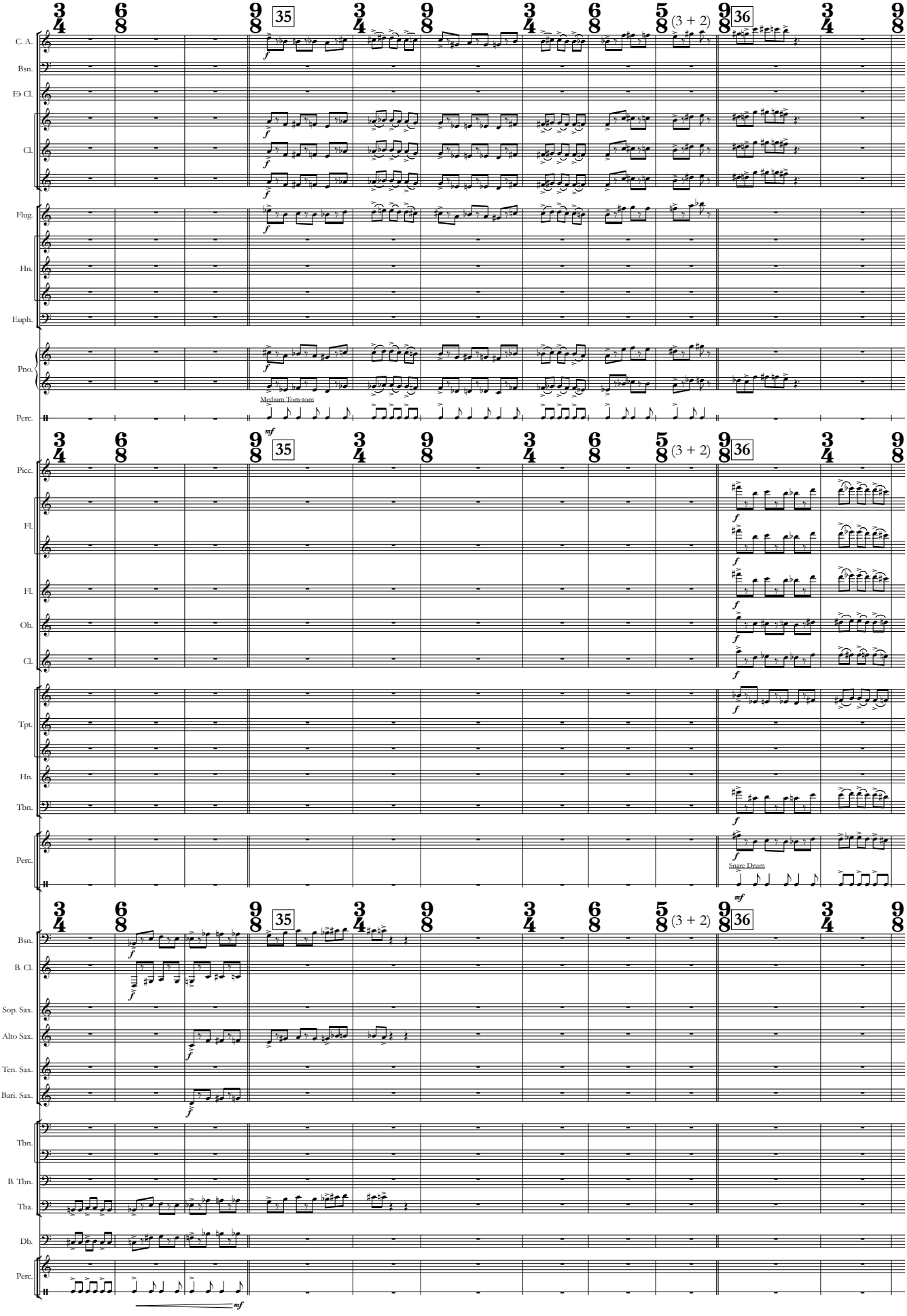

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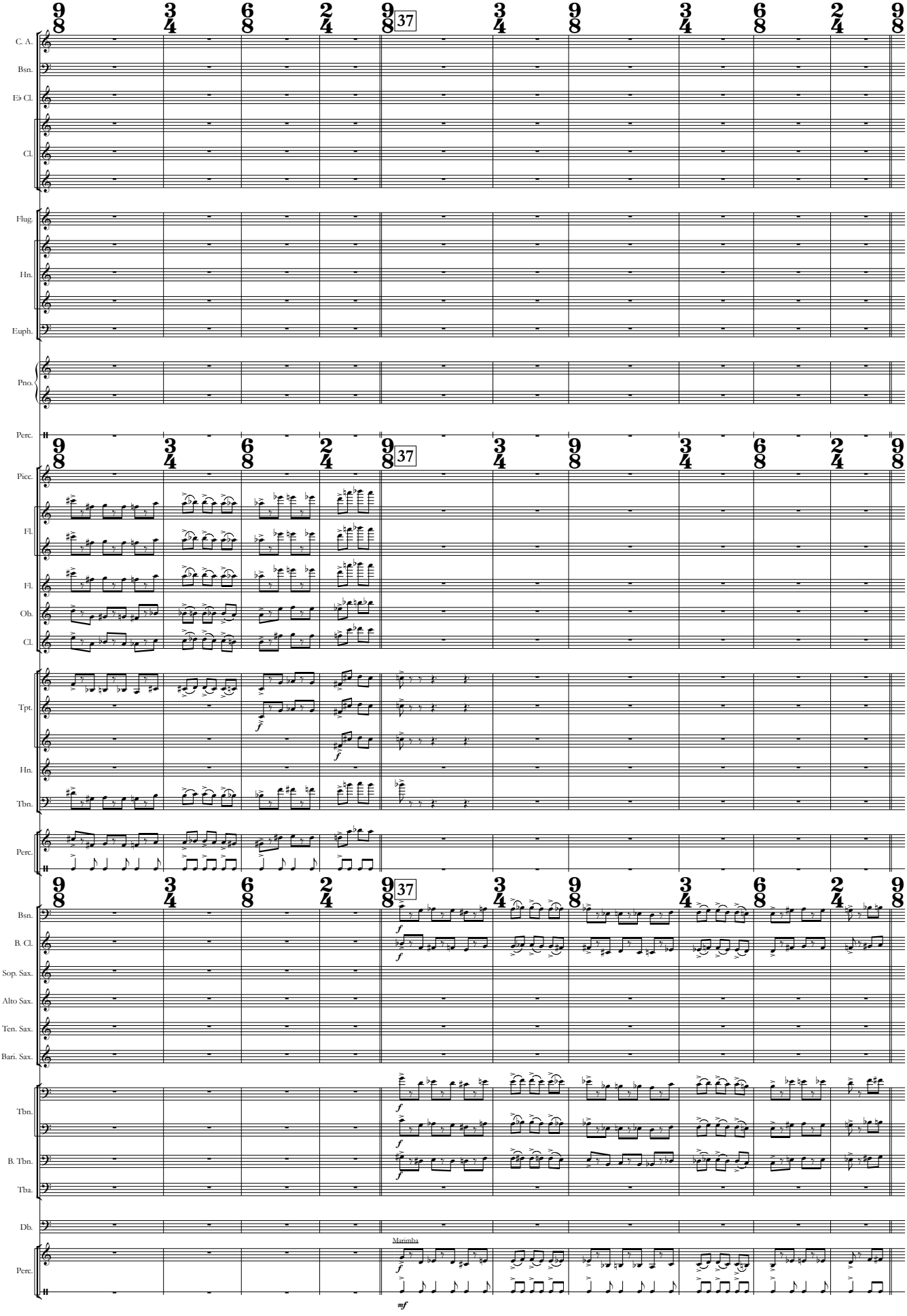

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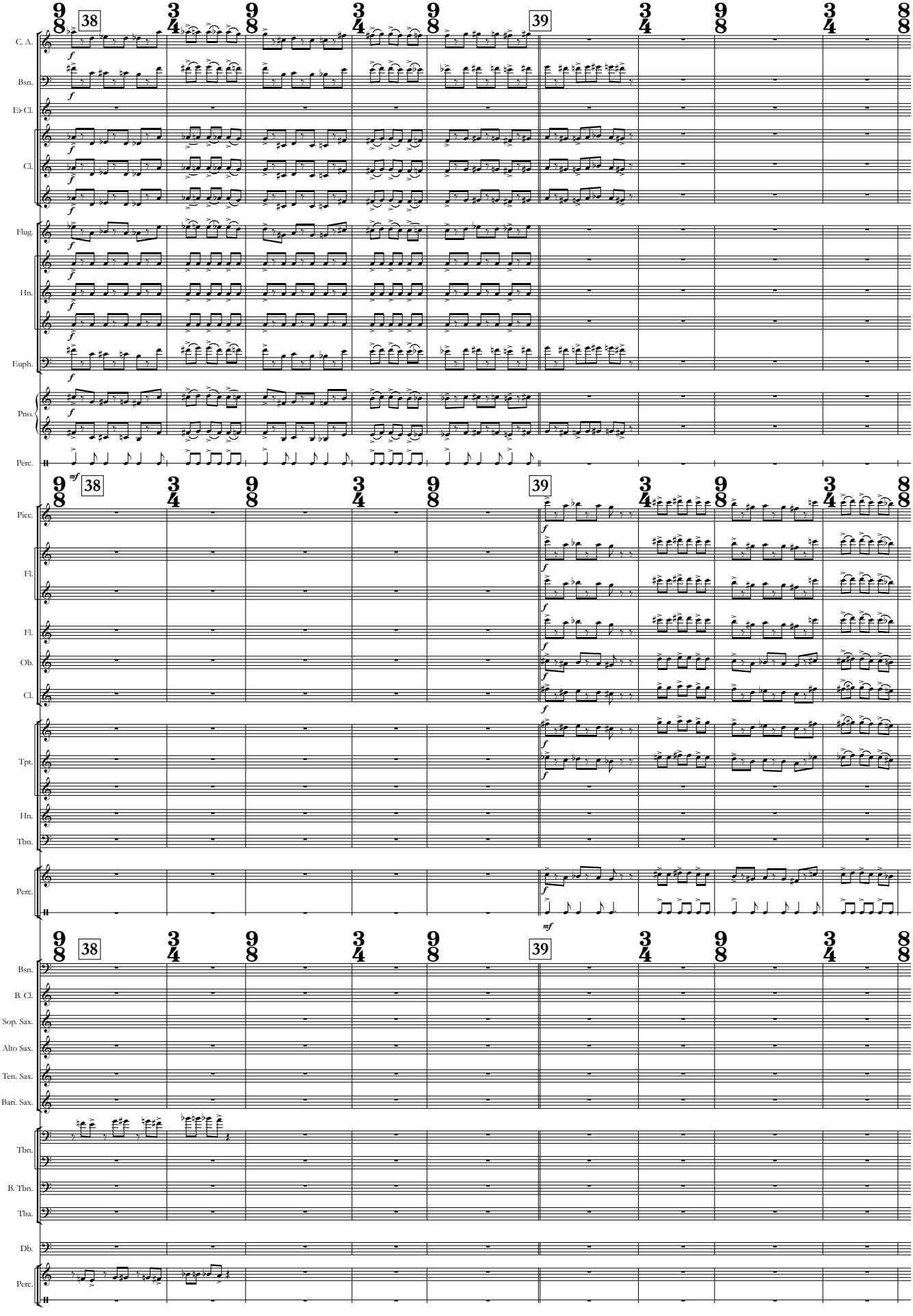

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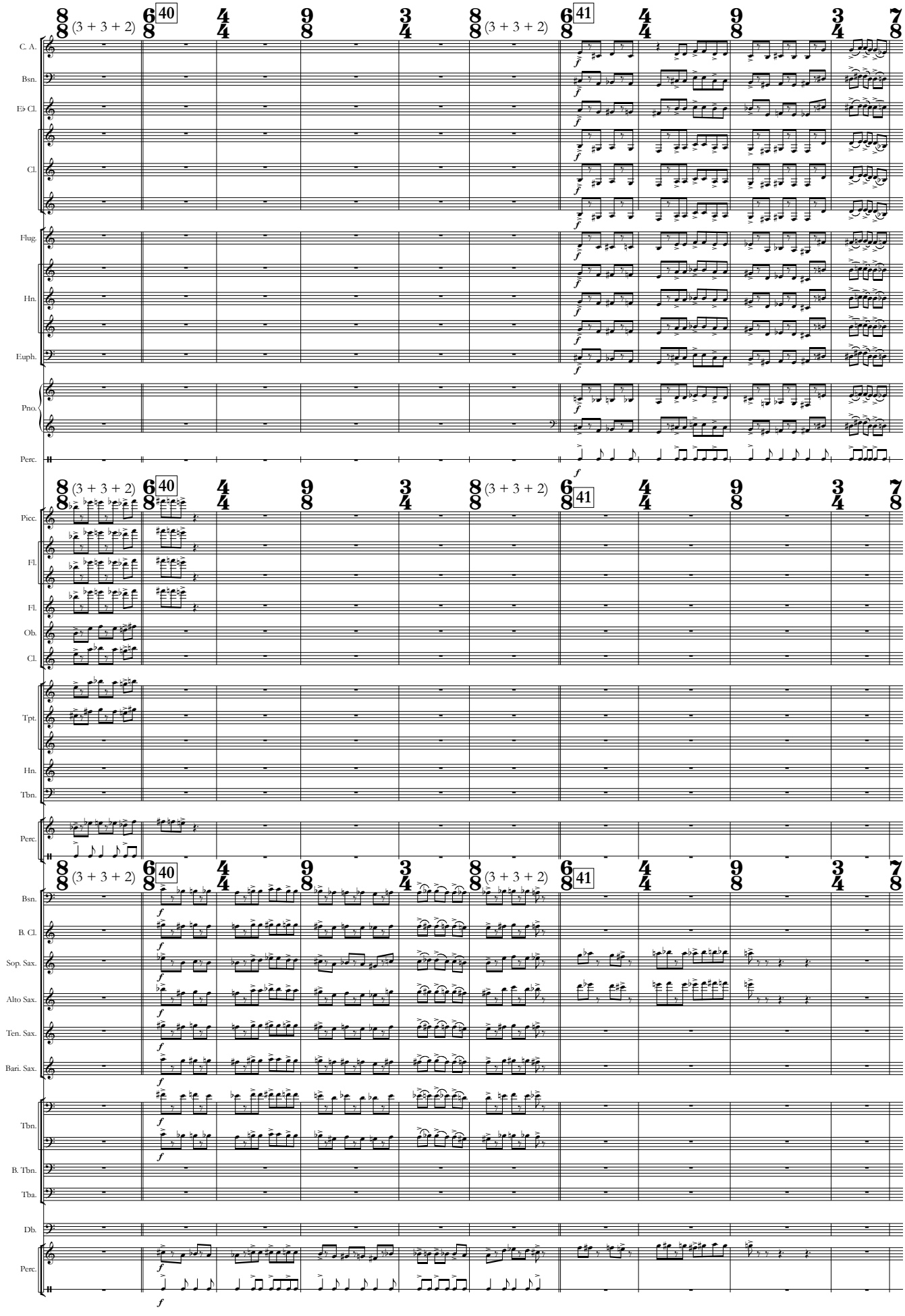

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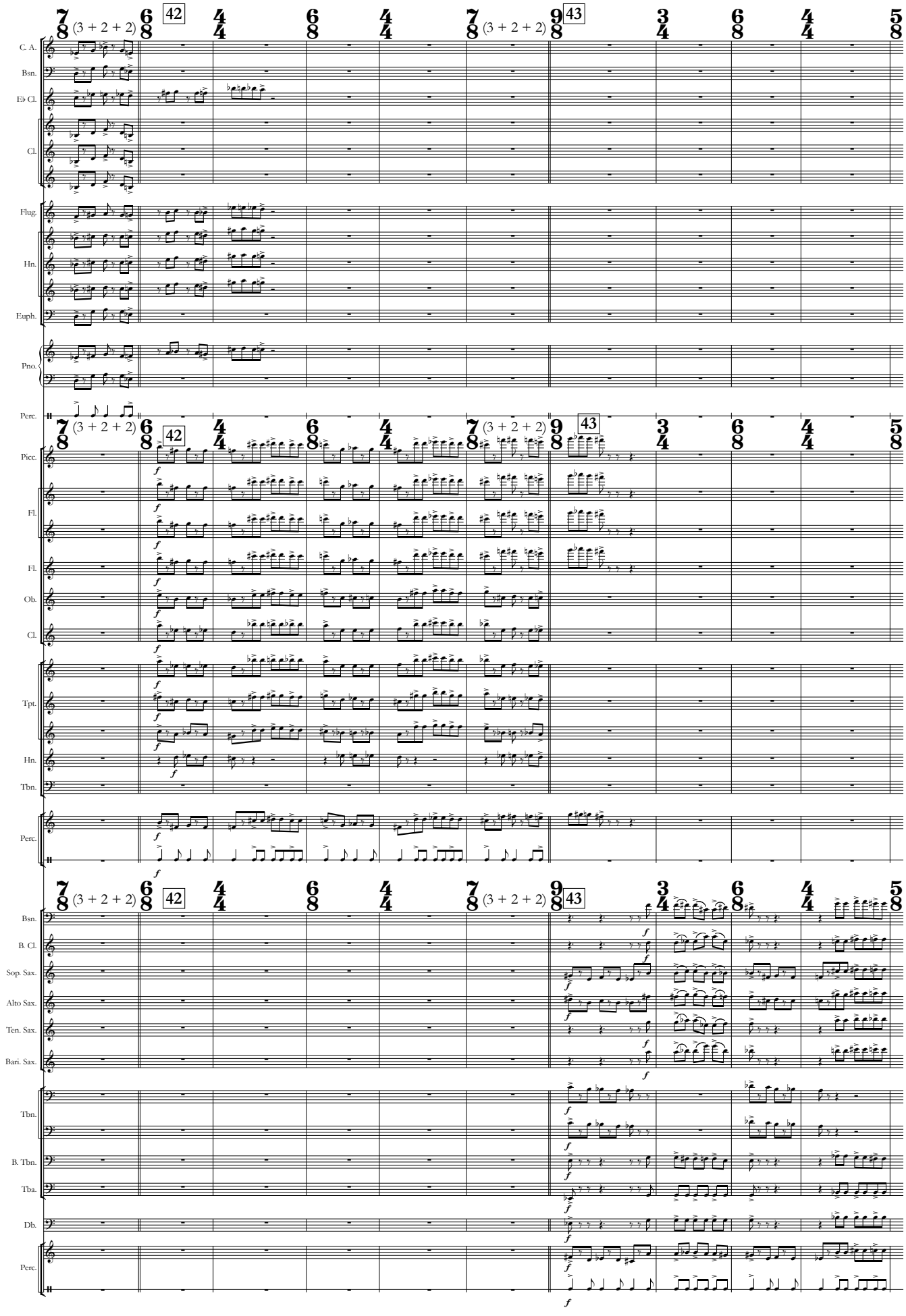

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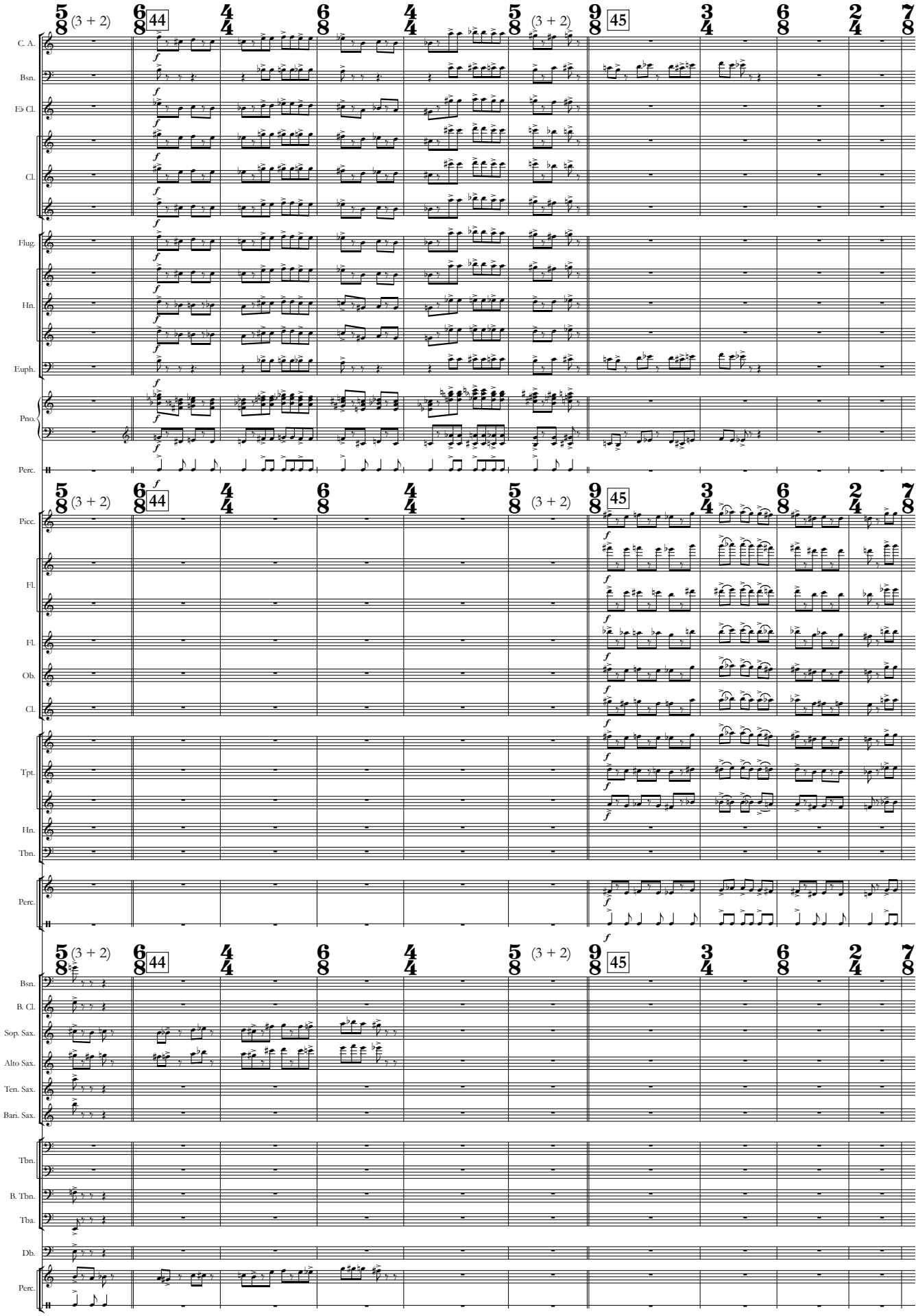

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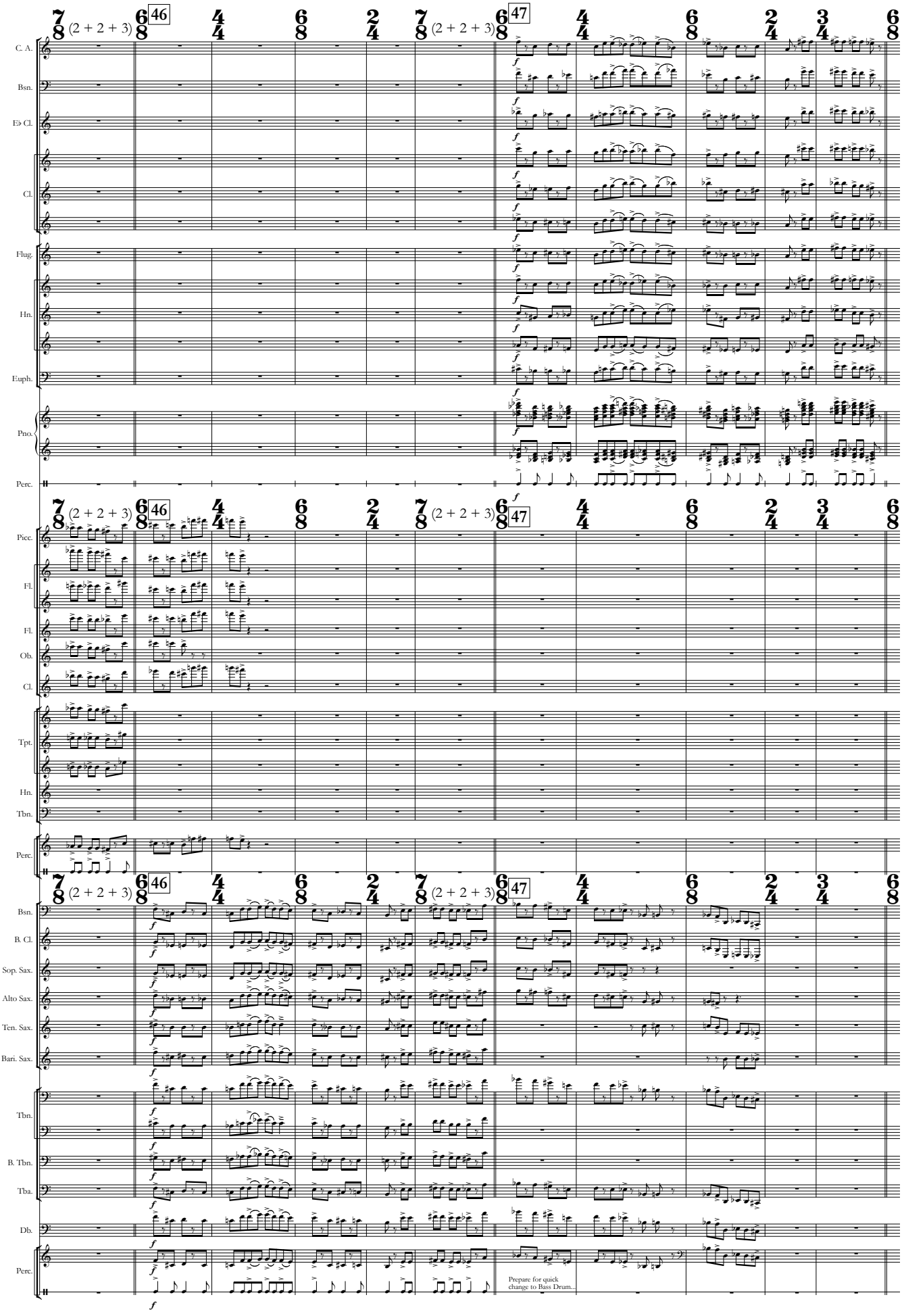

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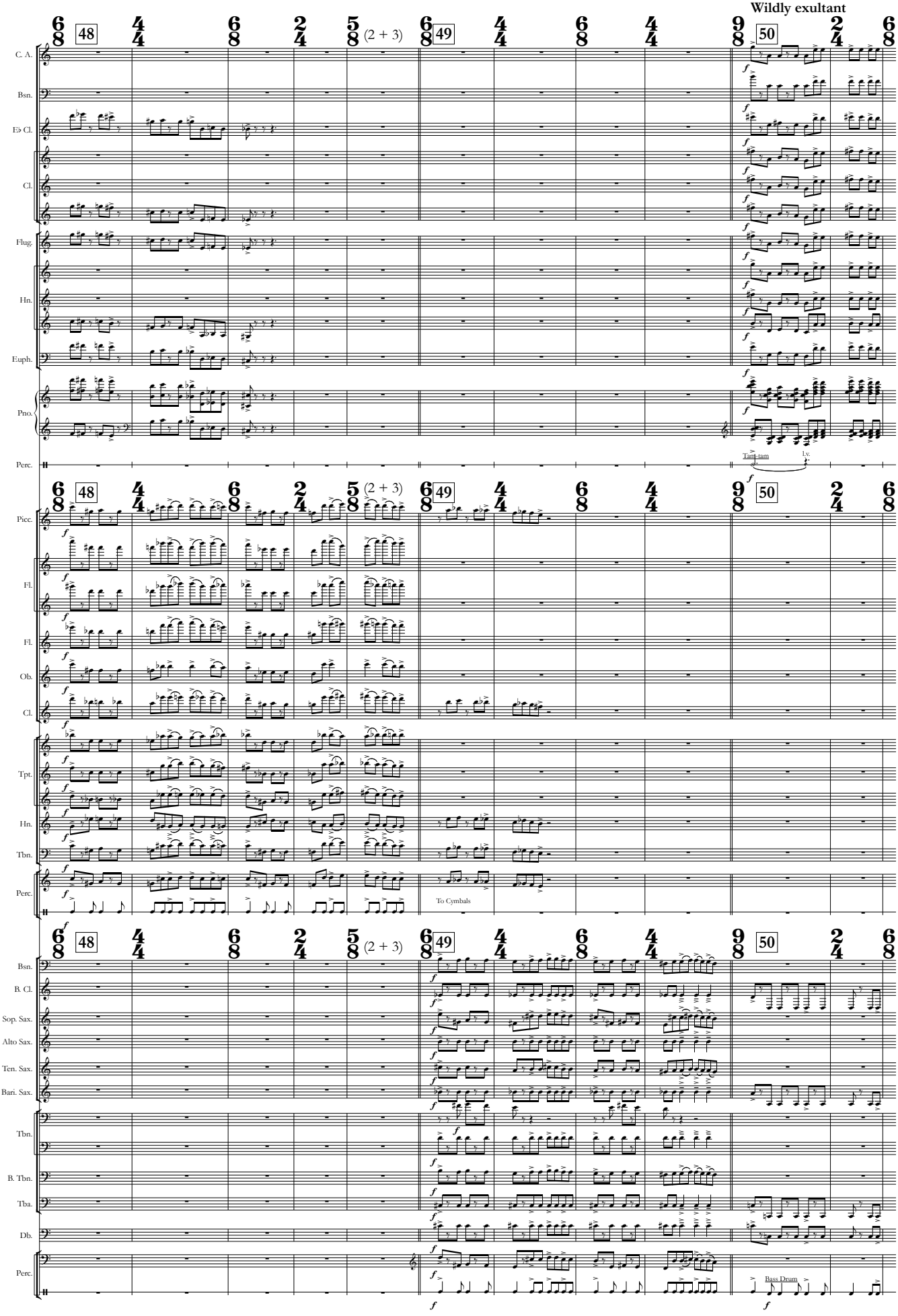

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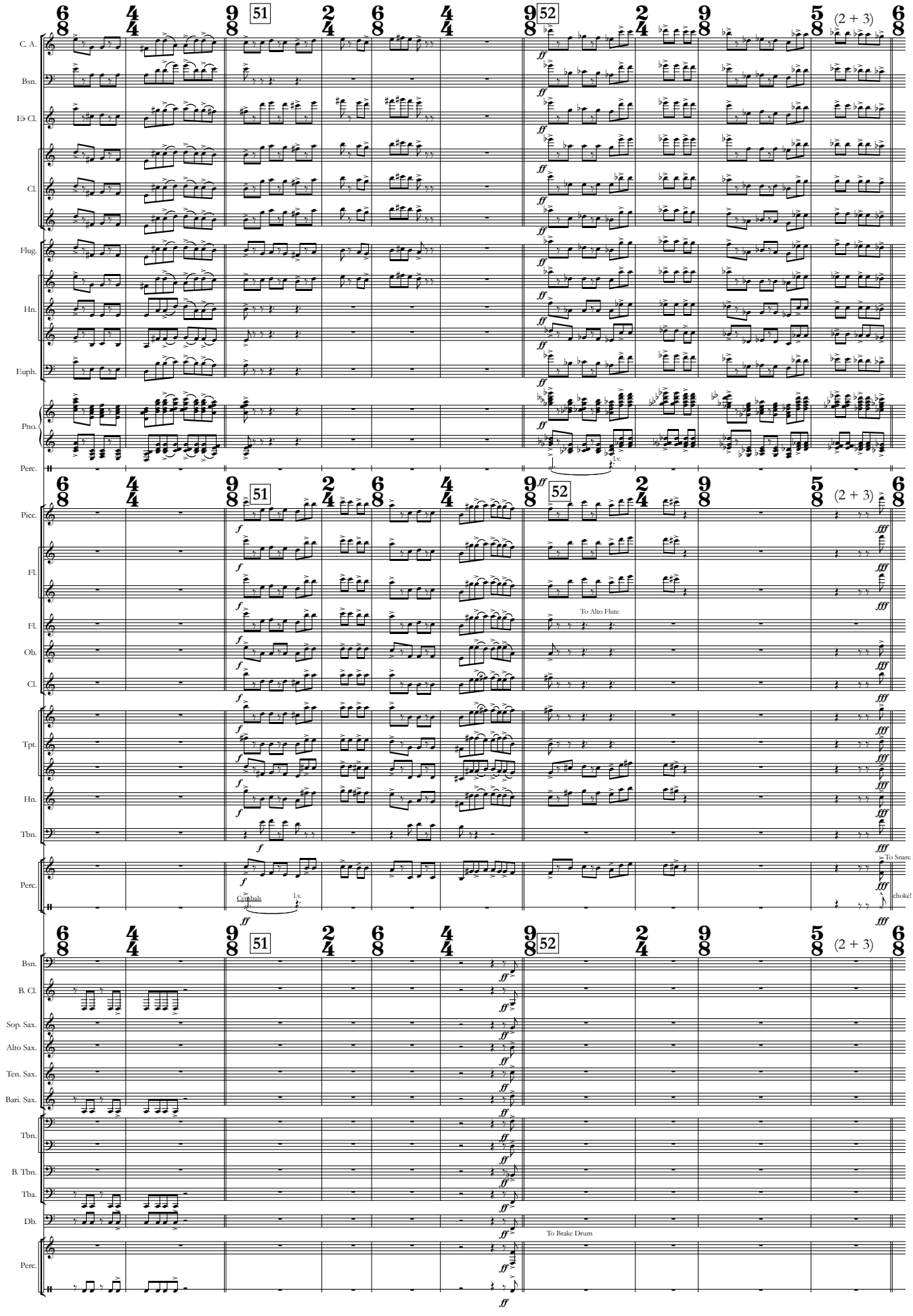

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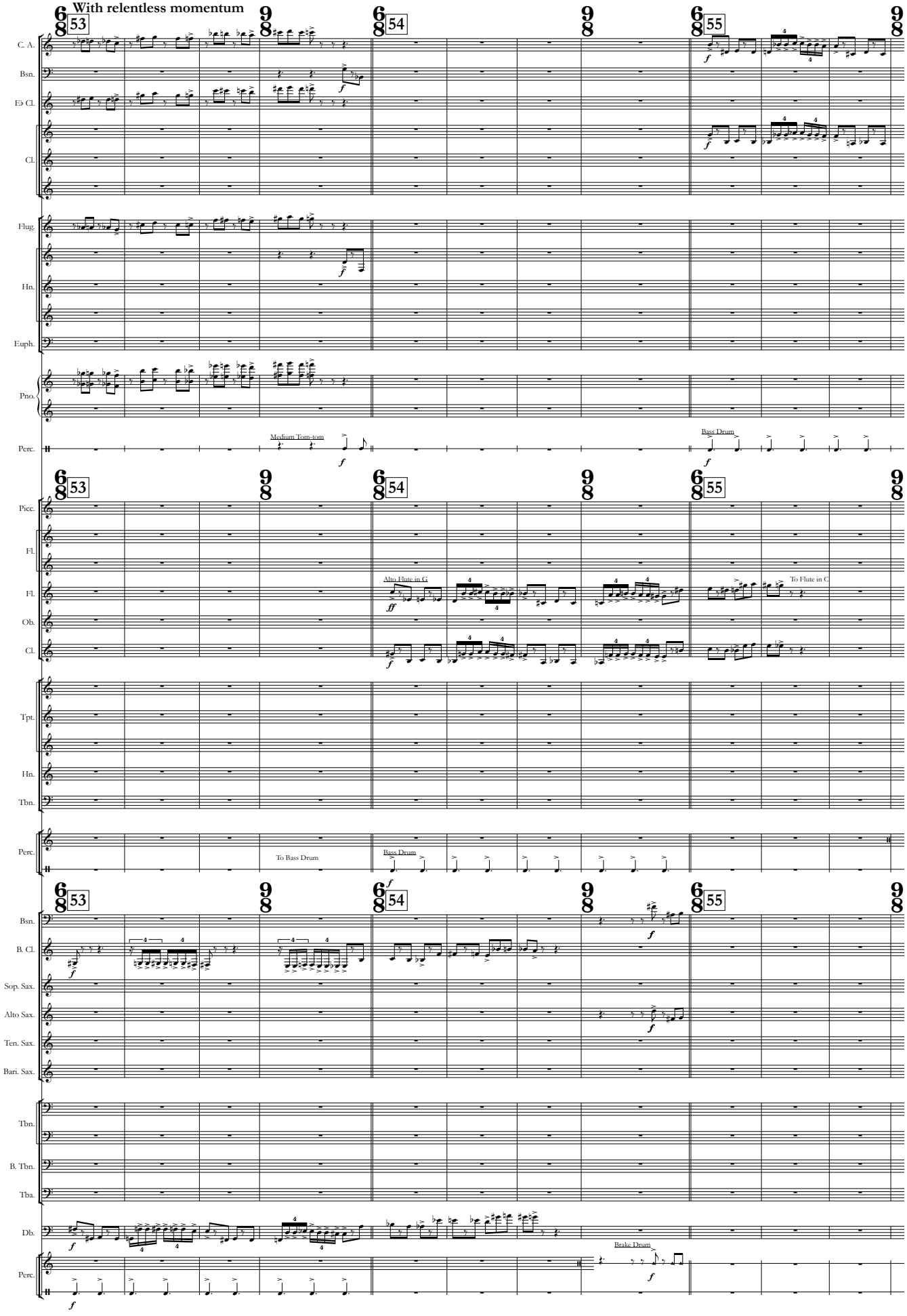

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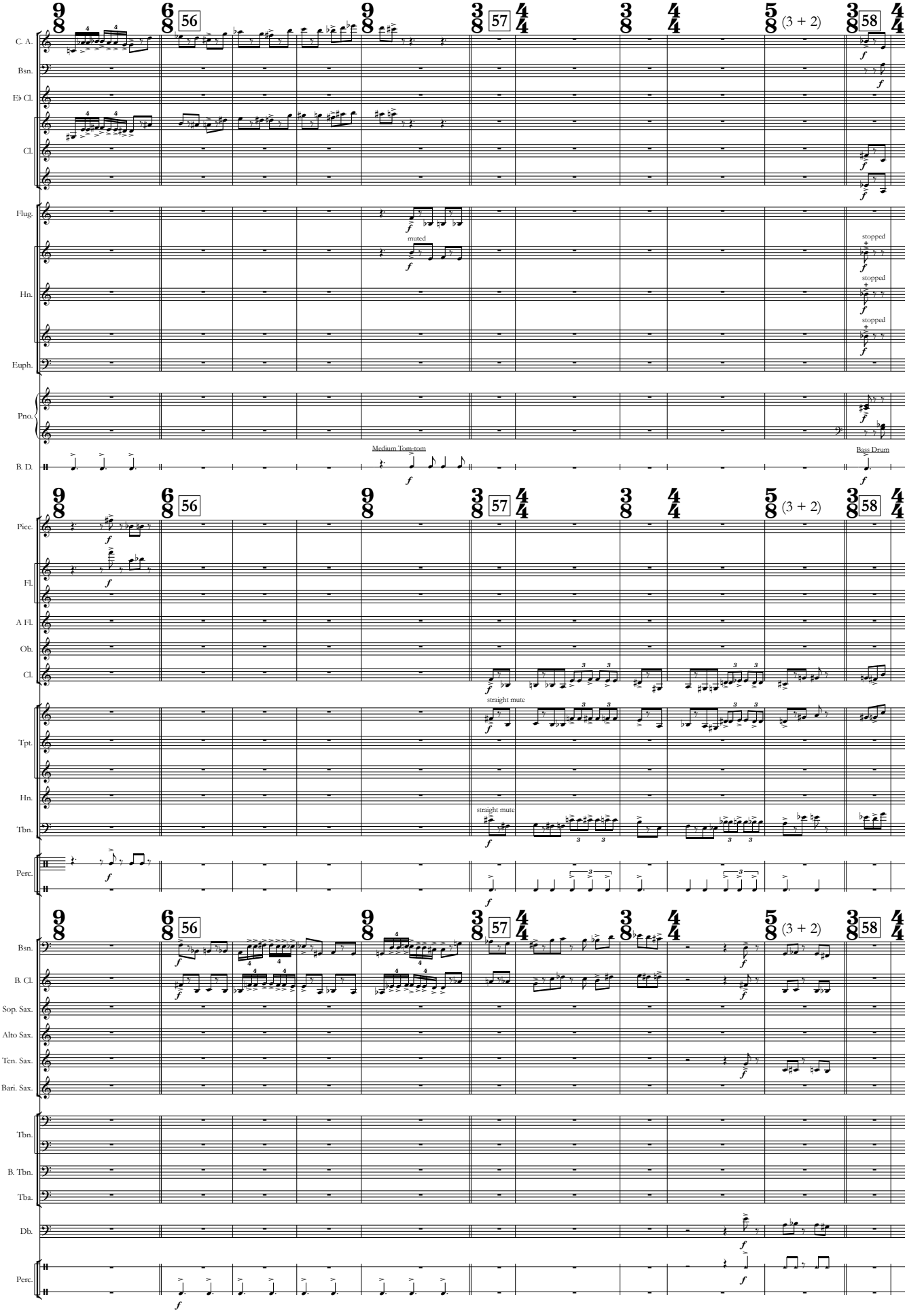

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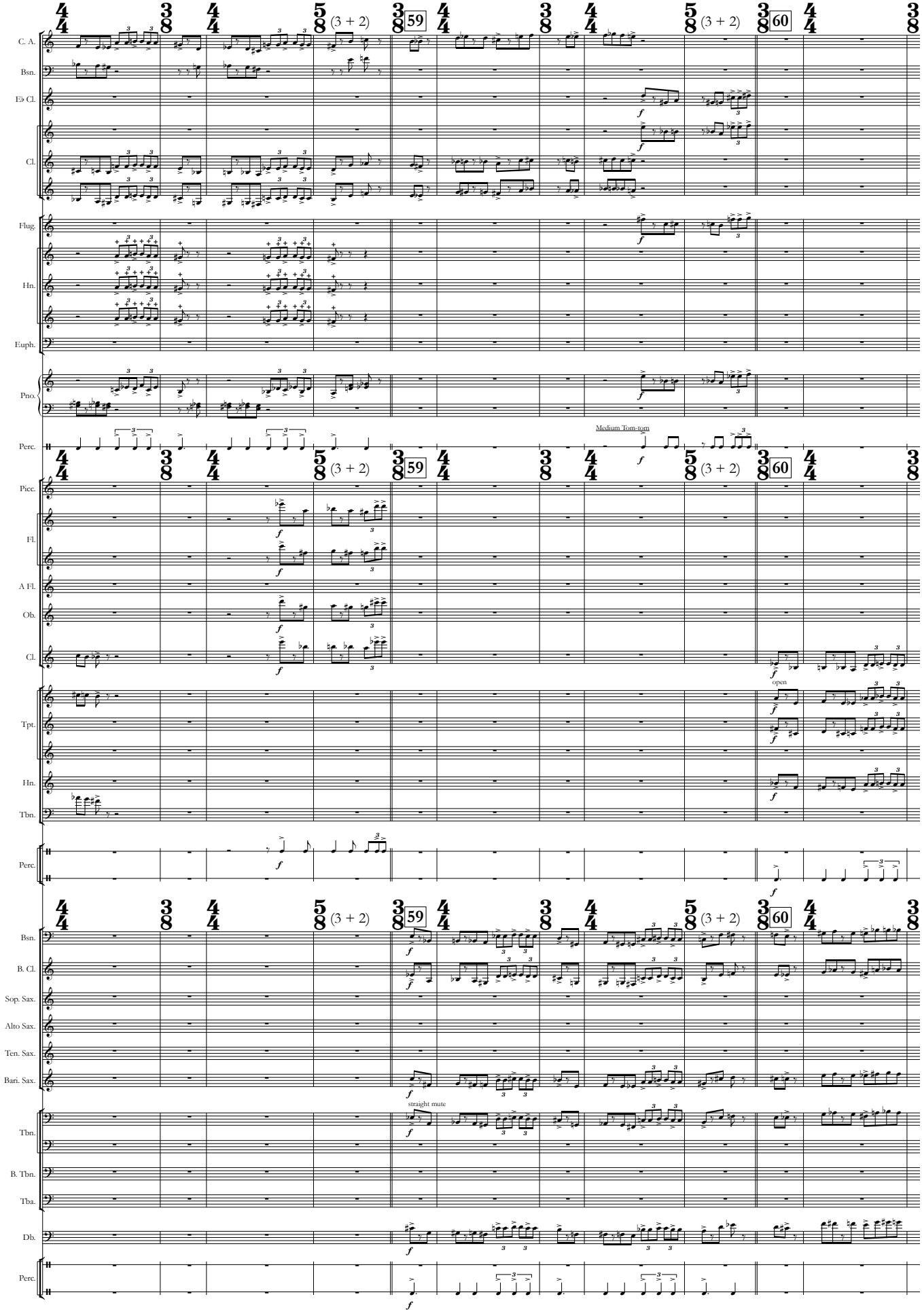

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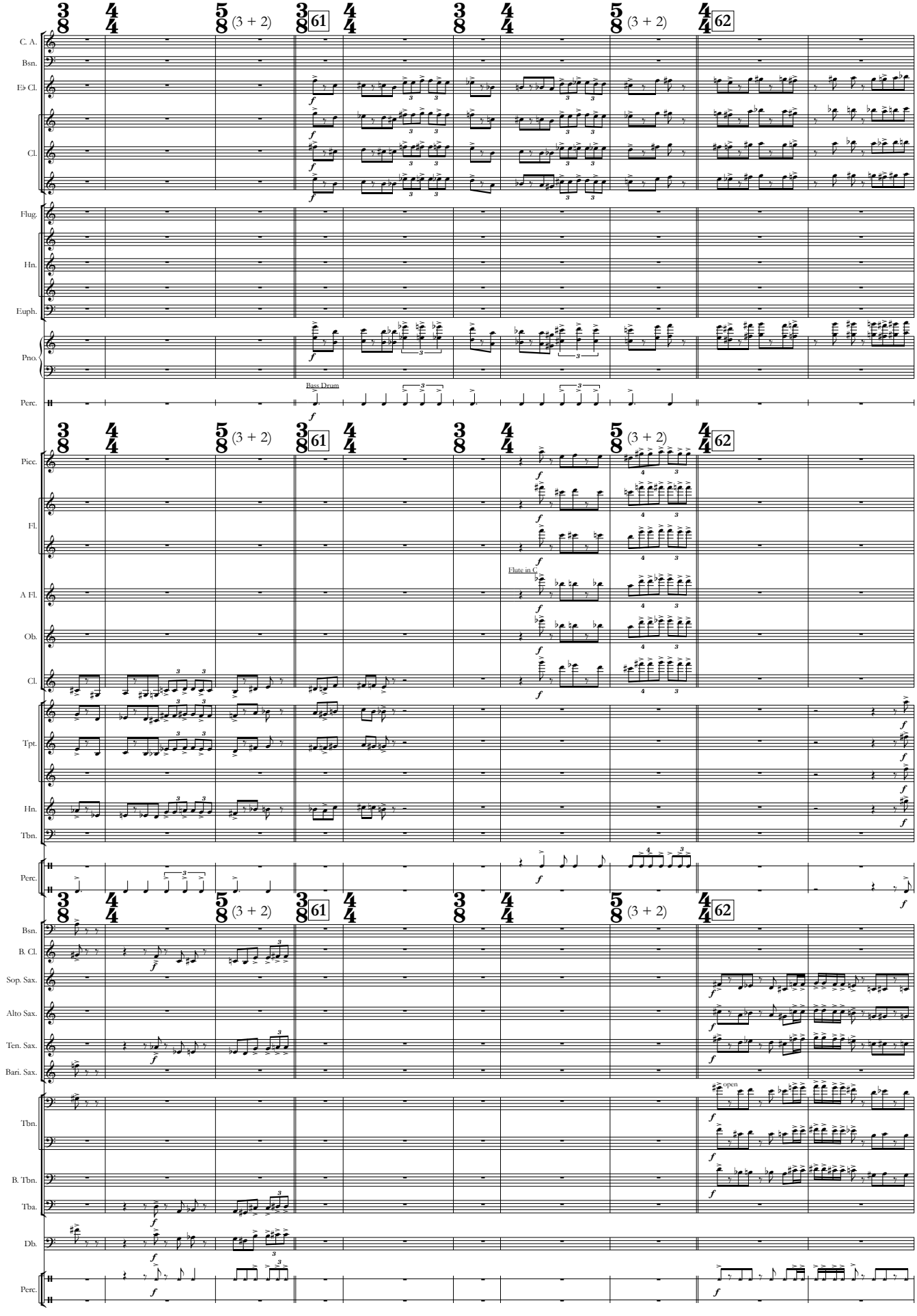

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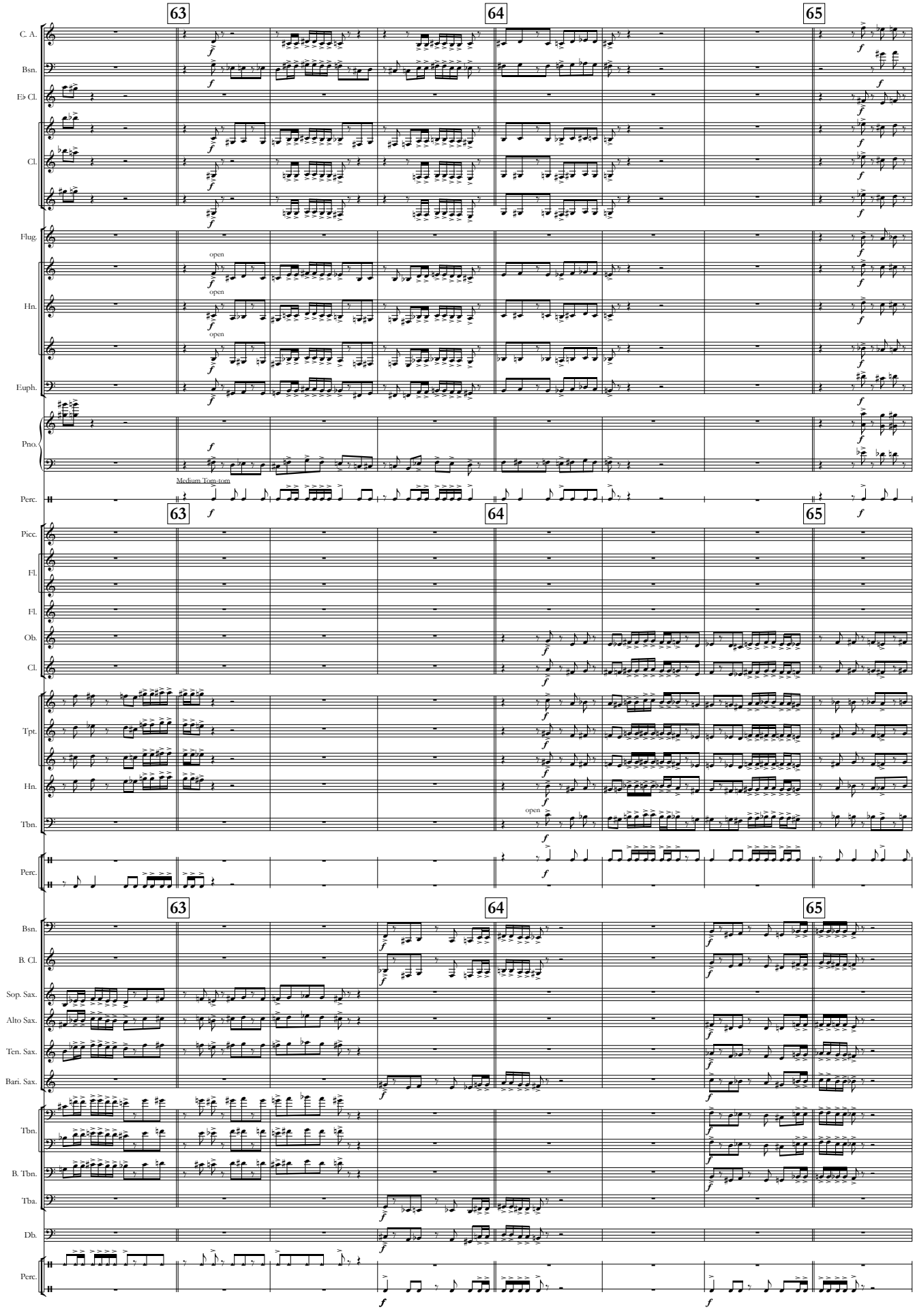

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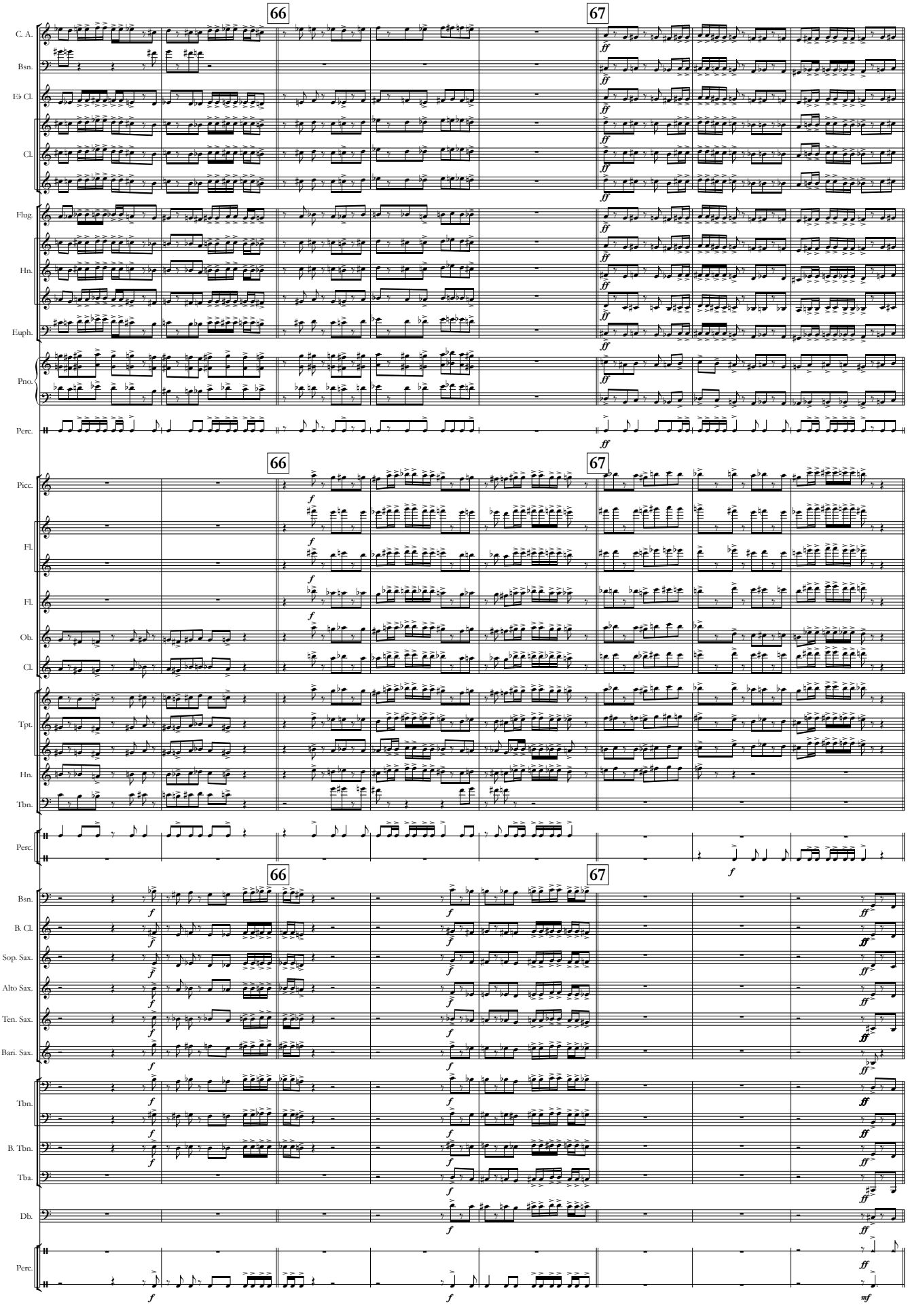

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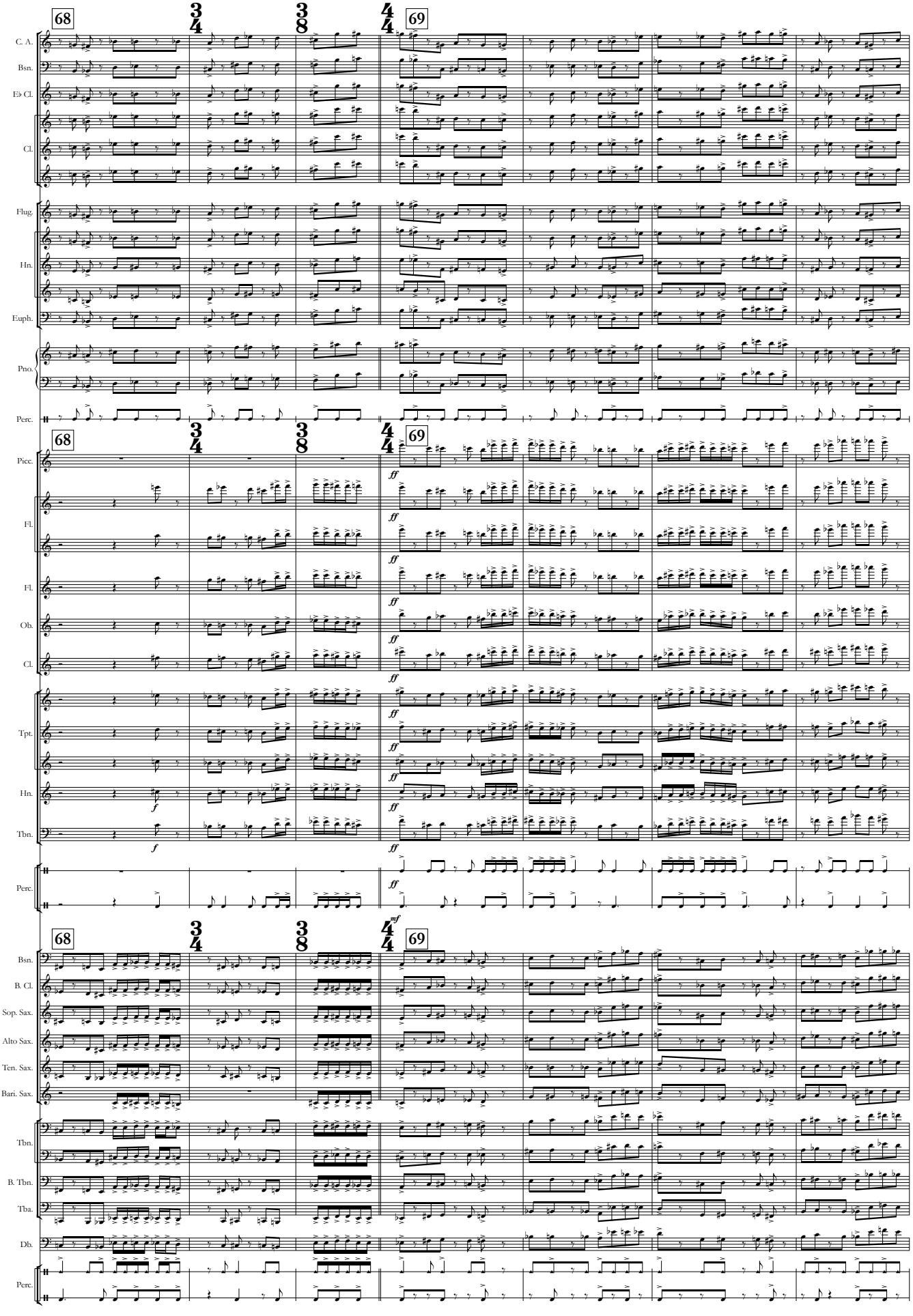

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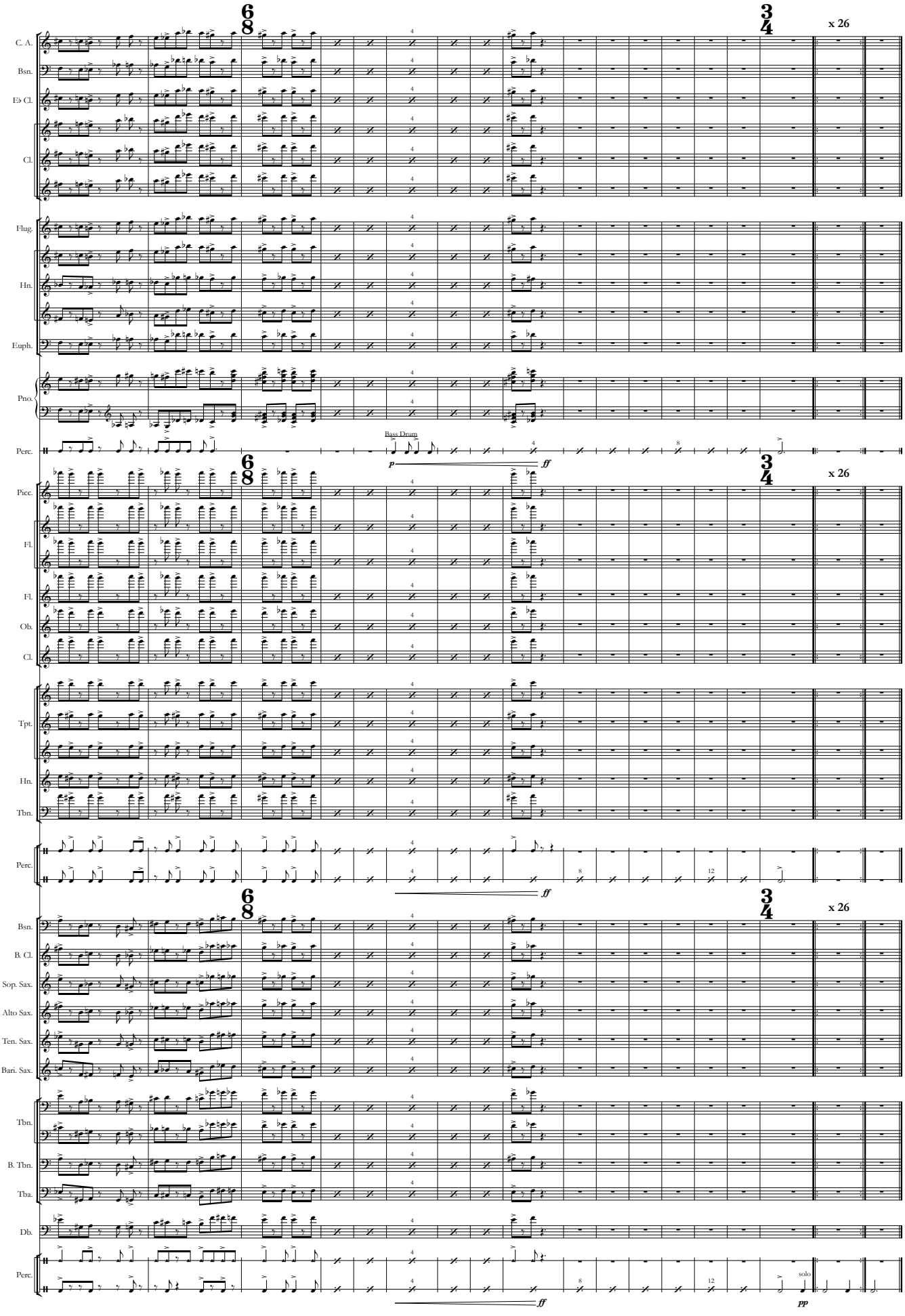


for Bel Sunstrom

Over the hills and far away

for wind ensemble

Instrumentation:

Piccolo
Flutes 1, 2, 3
Oboe
Clarinet in E♭
Clarinets in B♭ 1, 2, 3
Bass Clarinet in B♭
Bassoons 1, 2
Soprano Saxophone
Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone

Trumpets in B♭ 1, 2, 3, 4
Horns in F 1, 2, 3, 4
Trombones 1, 2
Bass Trombone
Euphonium
Tuba

Piano

Timpani

Percussion 1, 2
(tam-tam, glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone)

Offstage Rubber Ducks

David John Lang

2015

Over the hills and far away

Program Note:

Over the hills and far away is a story driven by an unlikely hope. Its title sounds light-hearted, but the music itself, for much of its 15-minute duration, does not.

It is a perilous adventure, a labyrinth of musical variations on a hidden theme that only gradually unravels to reveal itself. Follow it carefully! As more and more instruments pile into the mix, one by one, it can be hard to see any way out. Led into the dark unknown, you may start to wonder…

What is over the hills and far away? An endless path? A loop back to where we started? Nothing at all?

Performance Notes:

This piece is written for one player per part. Any spare or extra players should be a used to play the offstage rubber ducks.

All players may ‘opt out’ of the music for breaks at any point in which their part seems fairly redundant – particularly in the loud tutti passages when big groups are playing in unison. Players are to be encouraged to play everything that’s written, obviously, but have my permission to ‘save their chops’ as required, so long as they don’t make it obvious.

The 4th trumpet part is more demanding than the first three trumpet parts. But, as a proud bottom-trumpet-part player myself, I want to discourage the shuffling around of chairs to give this part to the principal player – let the 4th player have a chance to shine if they are up to the challenge!

The timpani part is fairly virtuosic. I have written it for six timpani (or five timpani and an upturned bass drum) to minimise the pedal changes, but I understand that sometimes that number of workable timpani may not be available. In that case, I leave the distribution and changing of pitches to the timpanist’s discretion – it is OK to compromise a little by using fixed pitches and the ‘close enough’ mentality that many composers adopted before the 20th century!

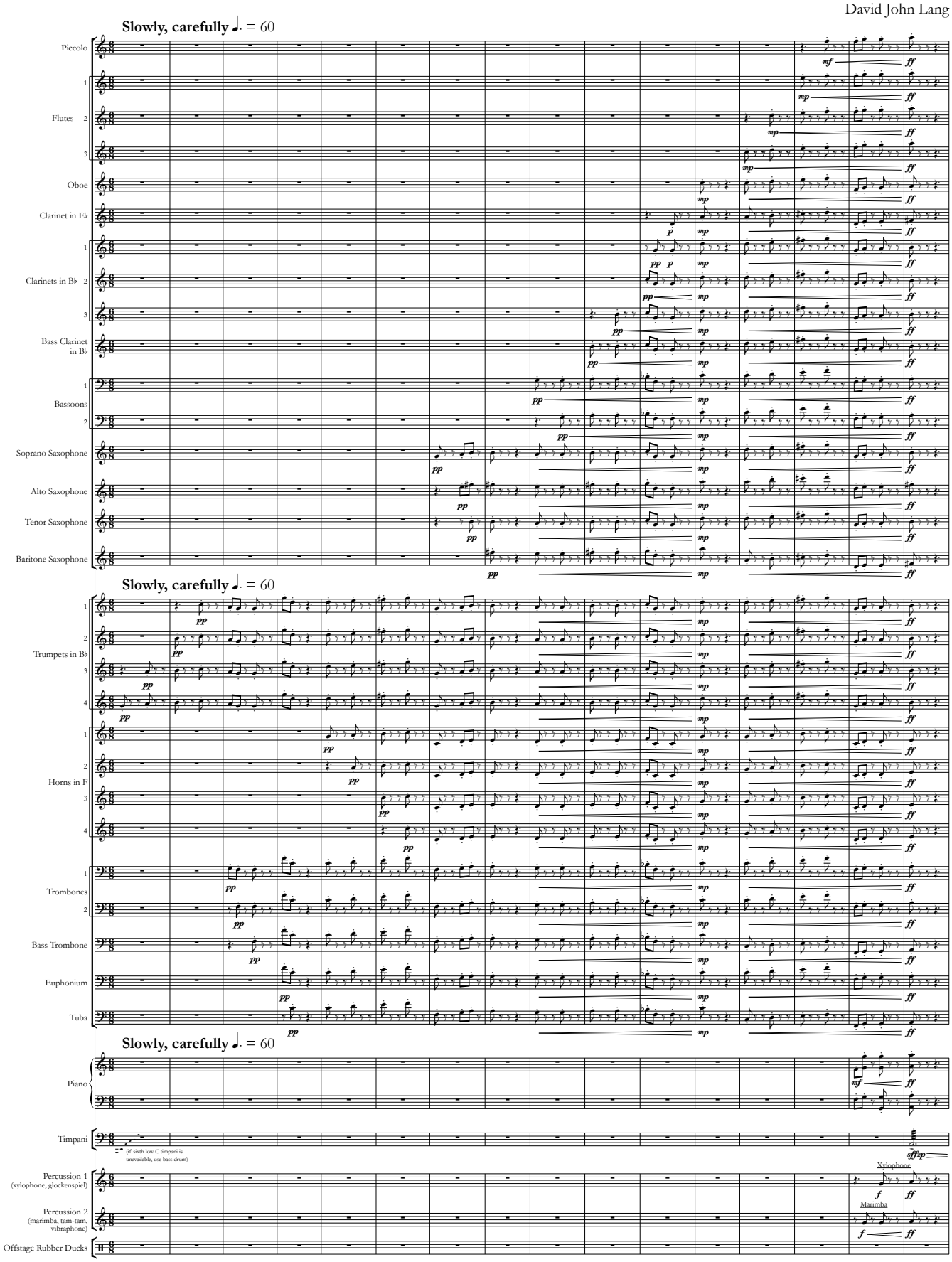
Staccato crotchets (or ‘quarter-notes’ for you Americans) are used for ease of reading in the main body of the piece and any overly-conscientious musicians in the ensemble need to refrain from trying to make them sound any longer than the staccato quavers (‘eighth-notes’) that surround them. There should be no noticeable difference in articulation or duration.

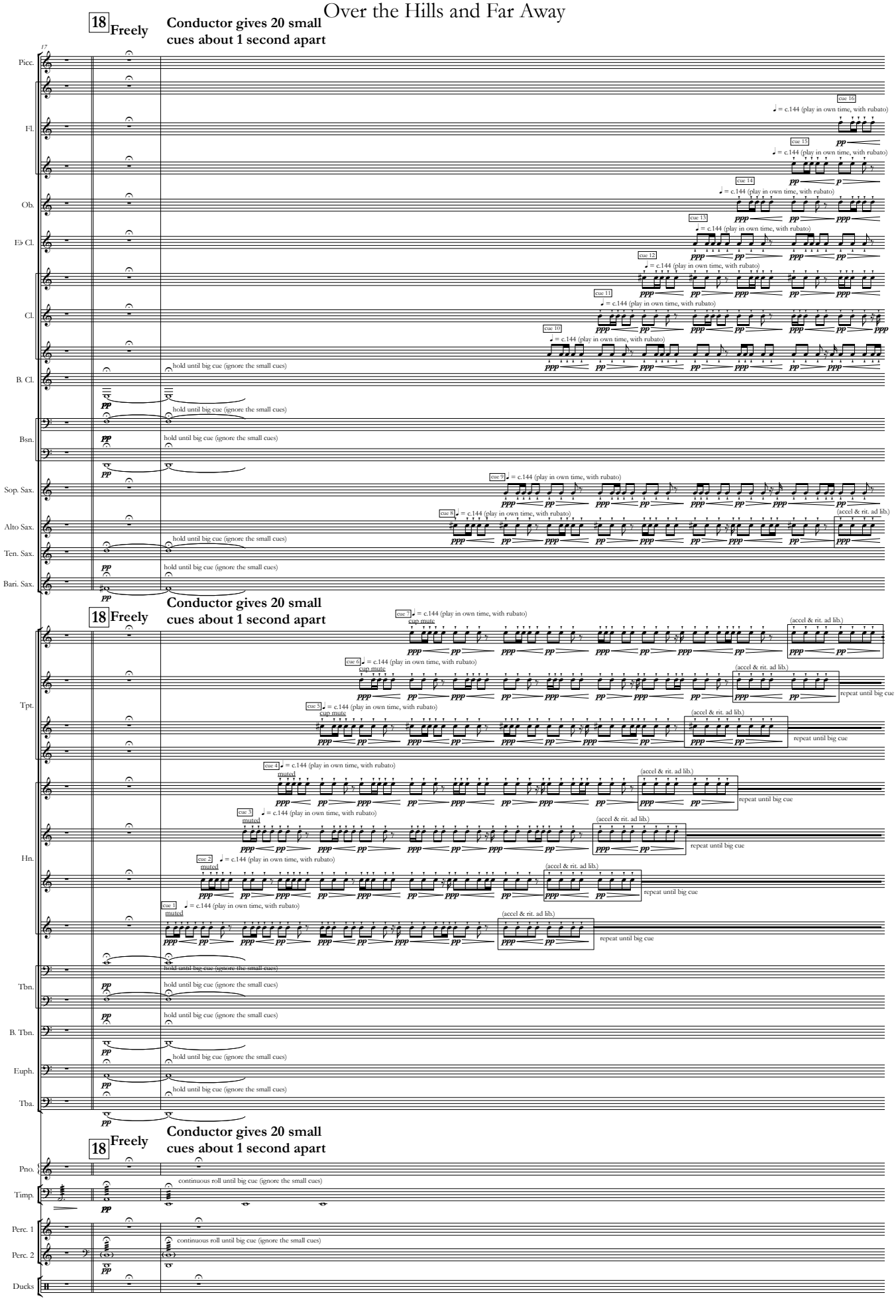
transposed score

for Bel Sunstrom

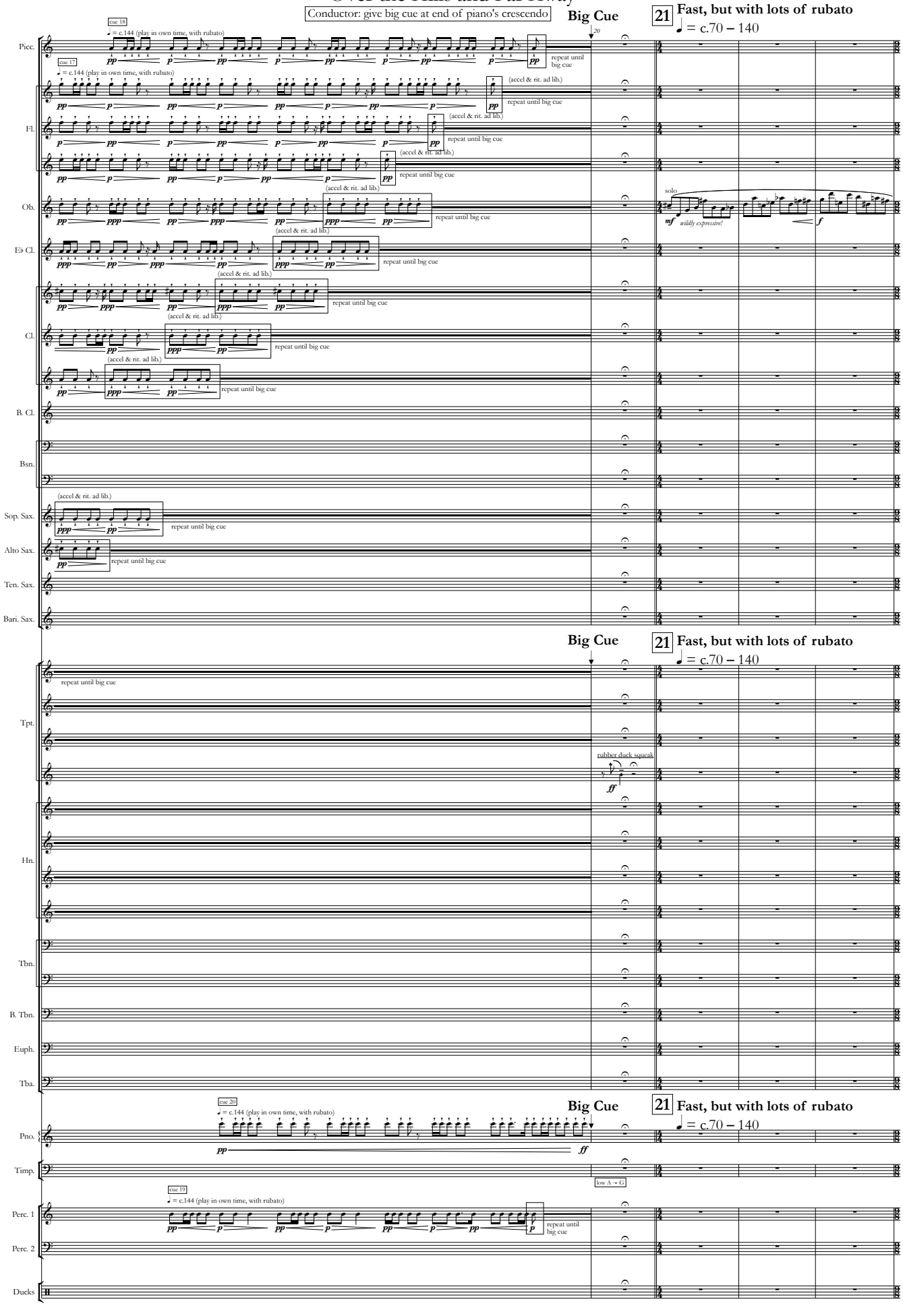
Over the Hills and Far Away

David John Lang




18 Freely
Conductor gives 20 small cues about 1 second apart
Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
E♭ Cl.
Cl.
B. Cl.
Bsn.
Sop. Sax.
Alto Sax.
Ten. Sax.
Bari. Sax.
Tpt.
Hn.
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
Euph.
Tba.
Pno.
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Ducks
cue 16
cue 15
cue 14
cue 13
cue 12
cue 11
cue 10
cue 9
cue 8
cue 7
cue 6
cue 5
cue 4
cue 3
cue 2
cue 1
♩ = c.144 (play in own time, with rubato)
hold until big cue (ignore the small cues)
cup mute
muted
(accel & rit. ad lib.)
repeat until big cue
continuous roll until big cue (ignore the small cues)

Over the Hills and Far Away



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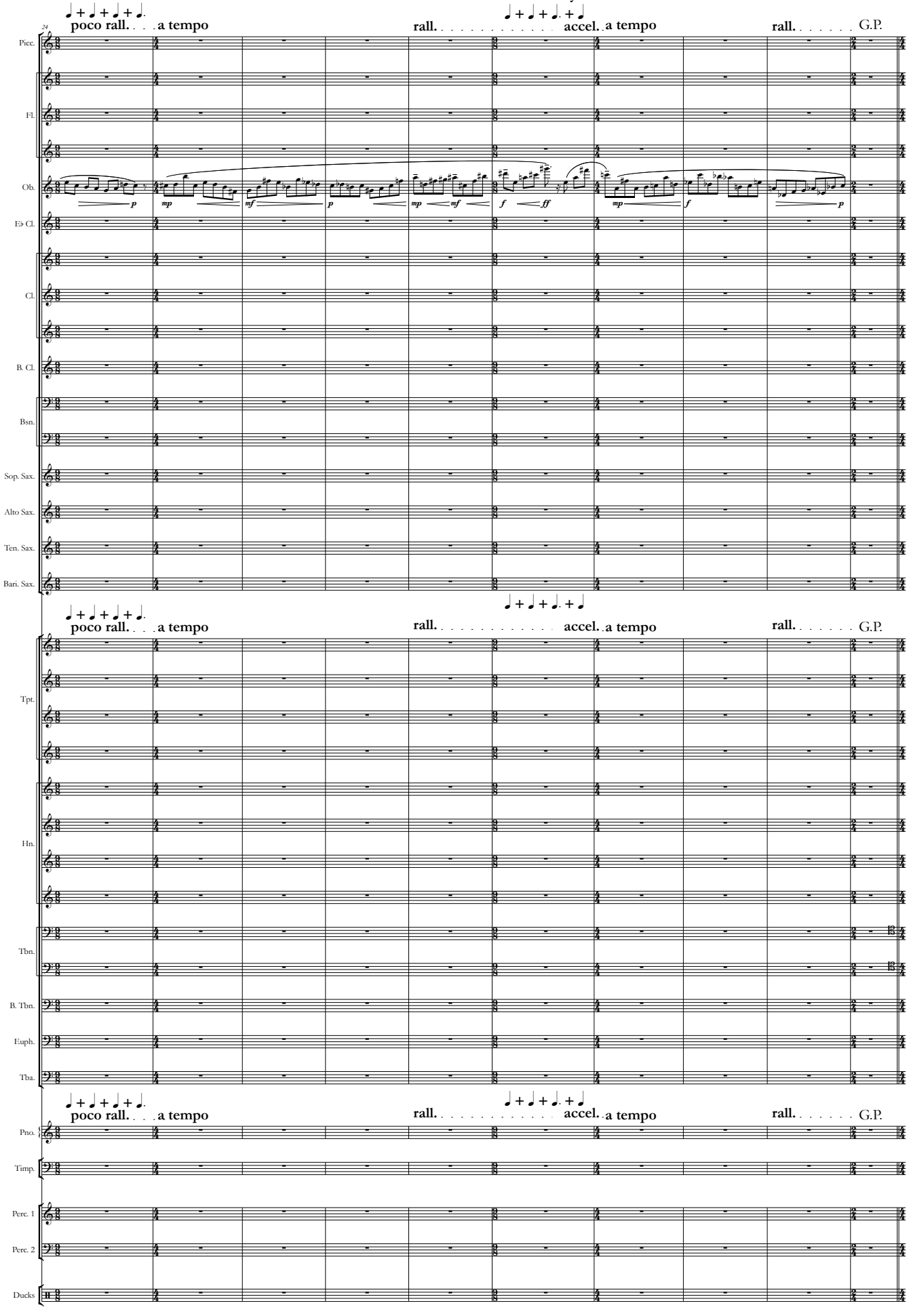

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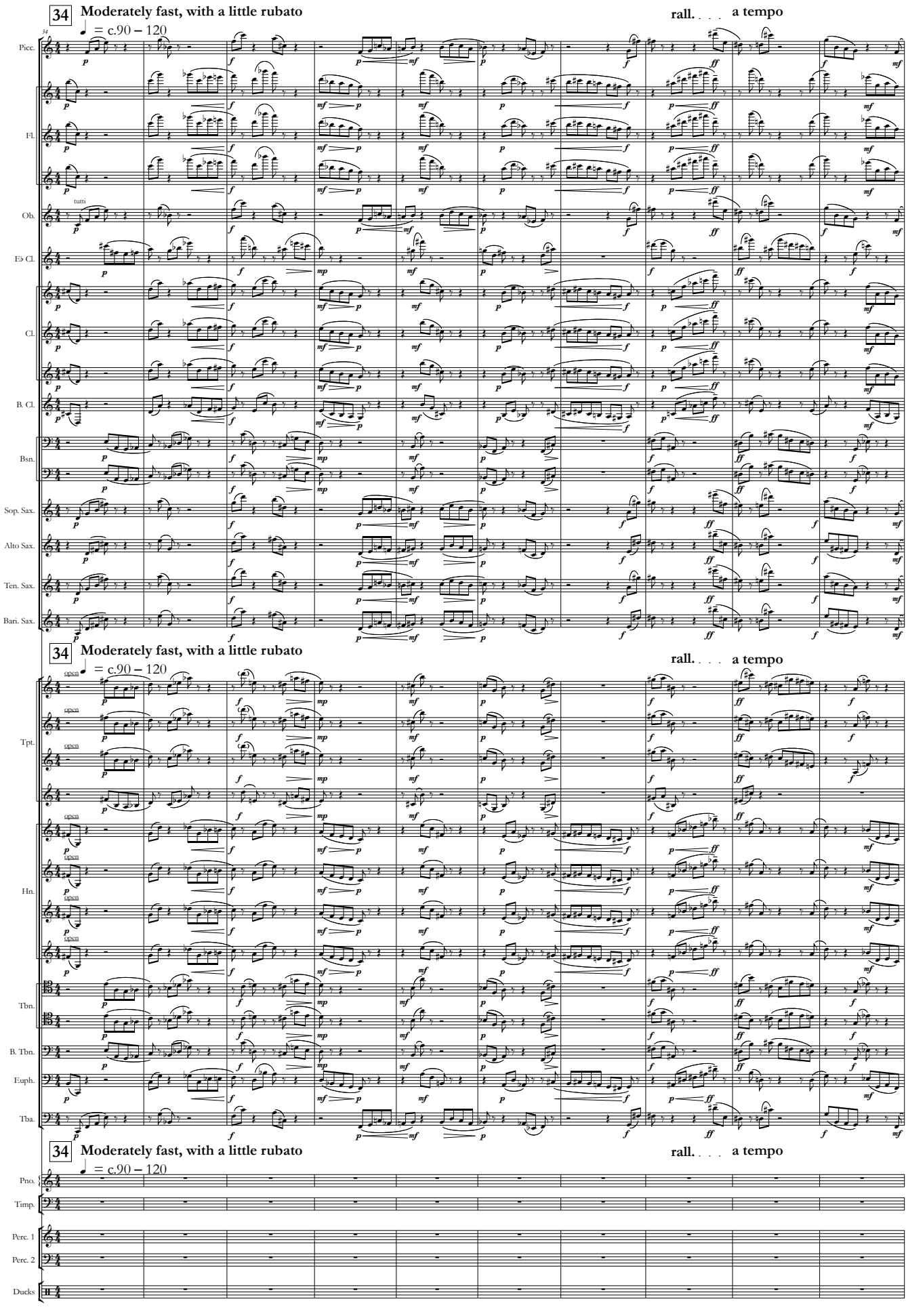

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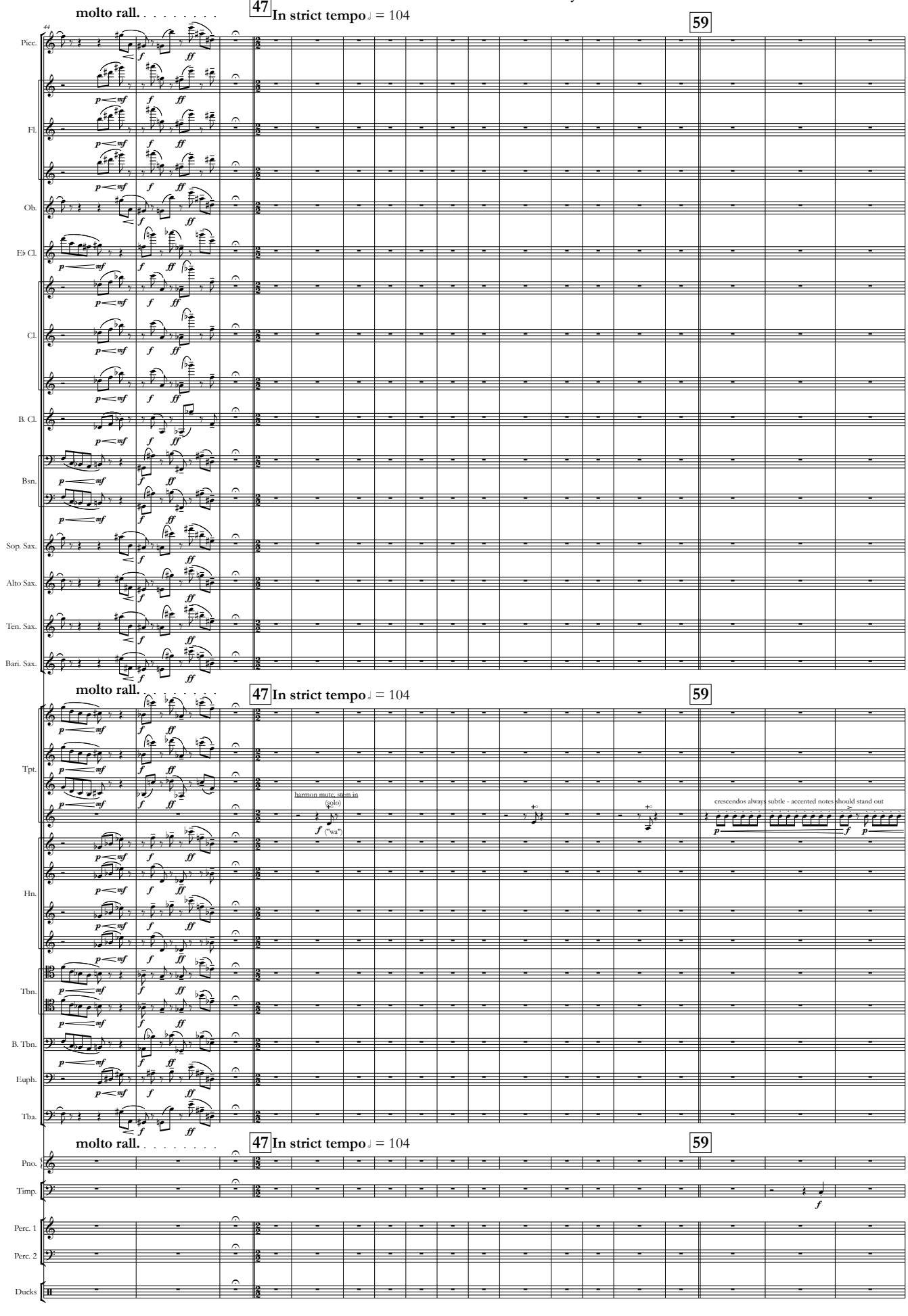

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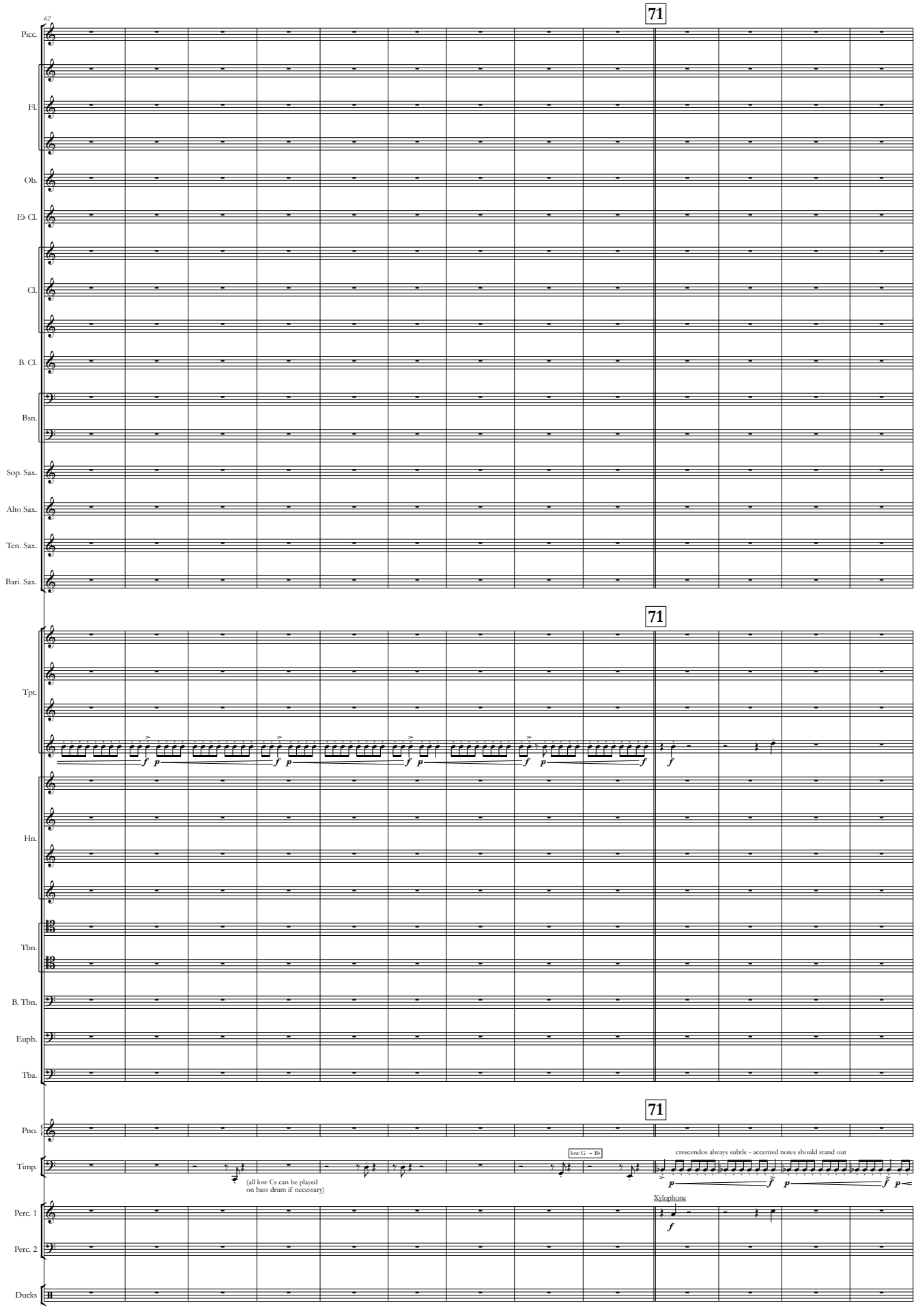

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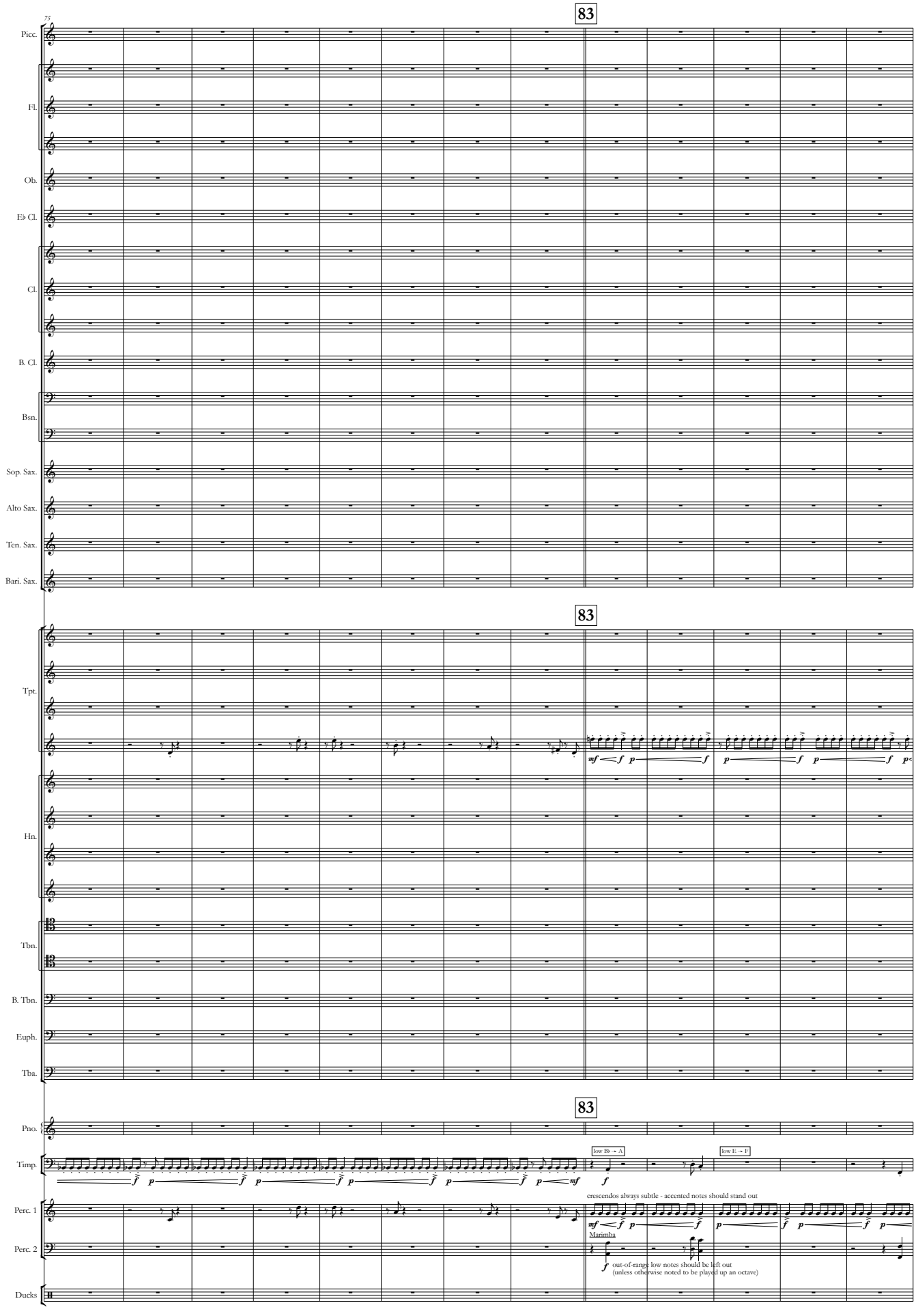

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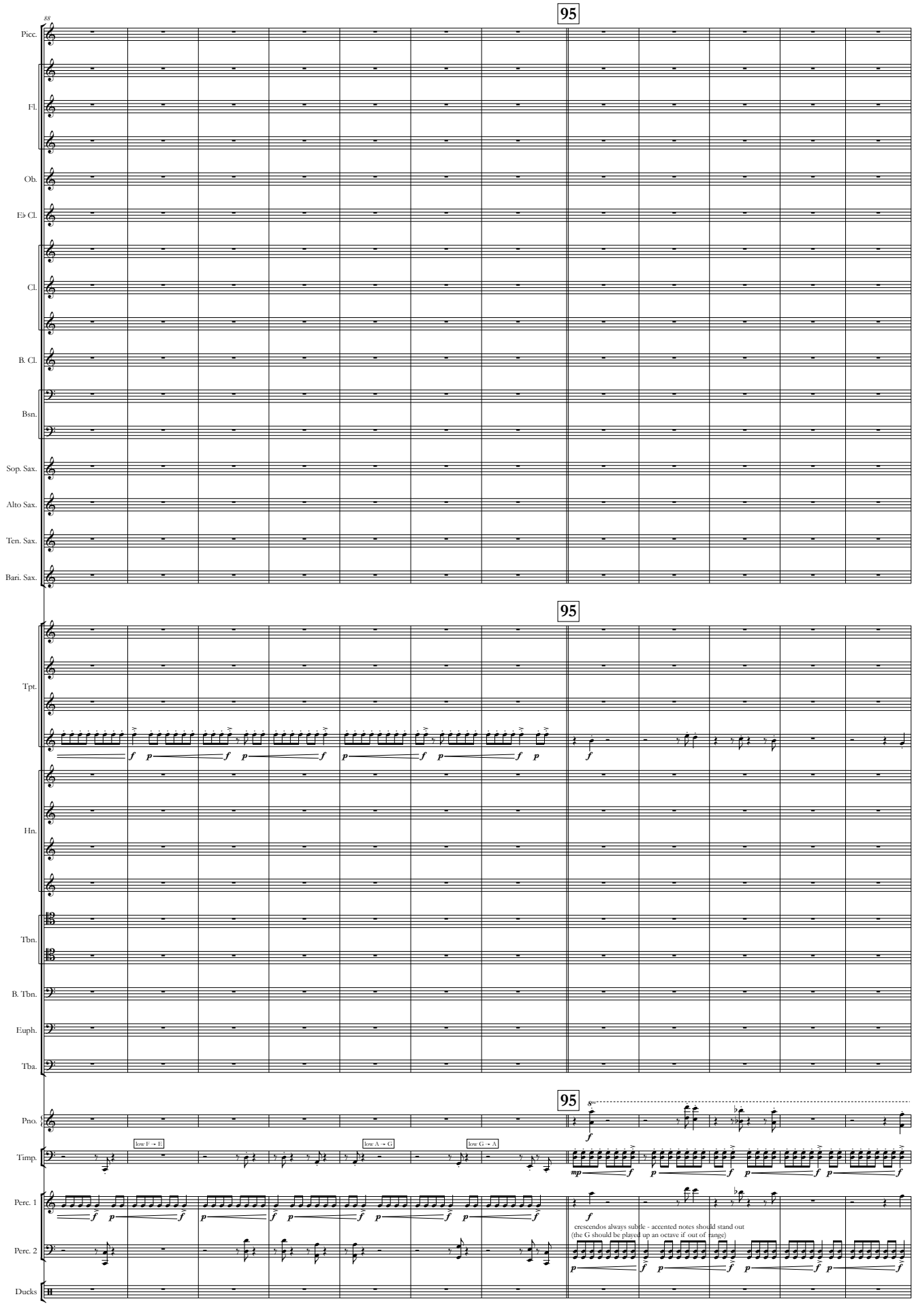

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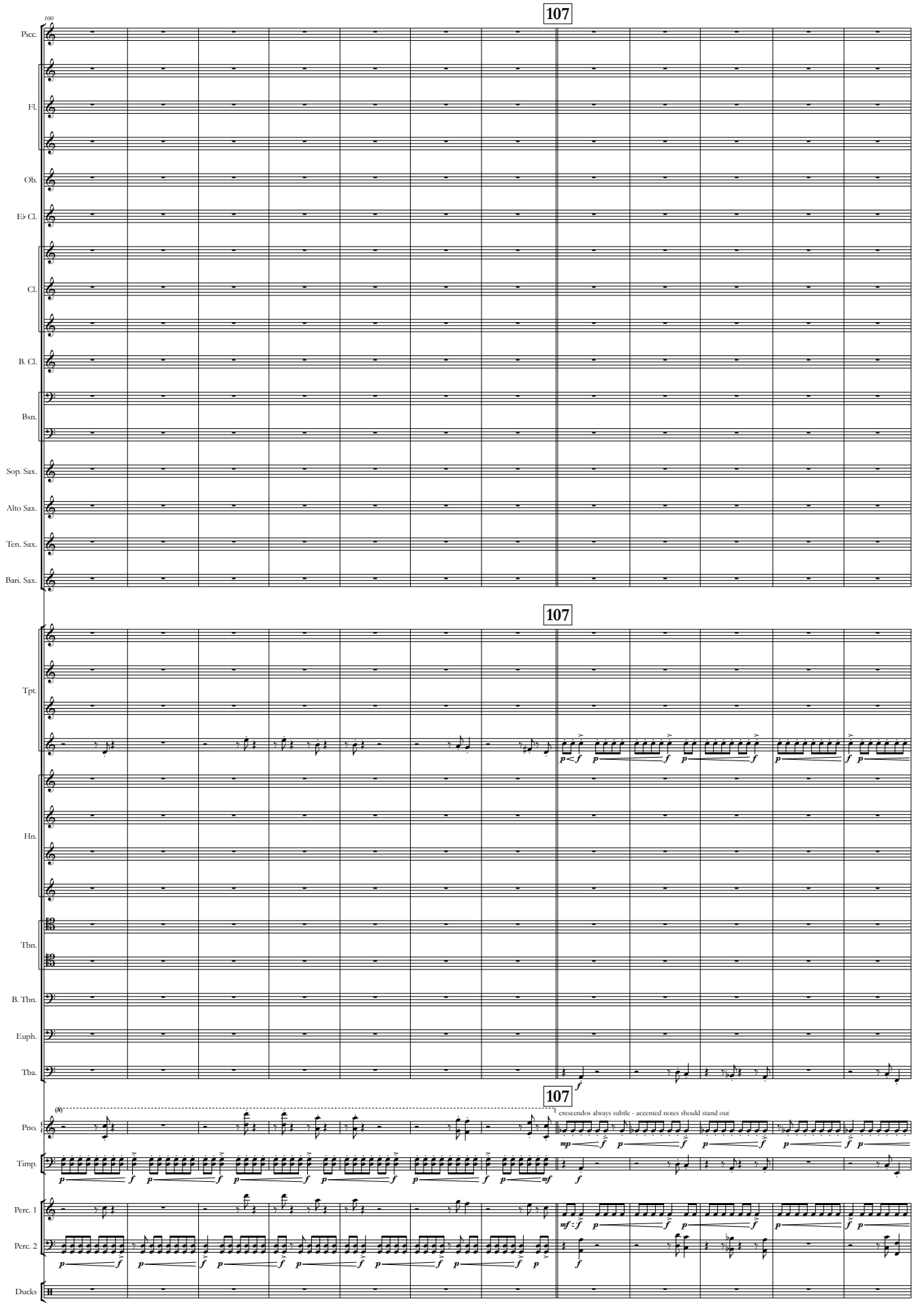

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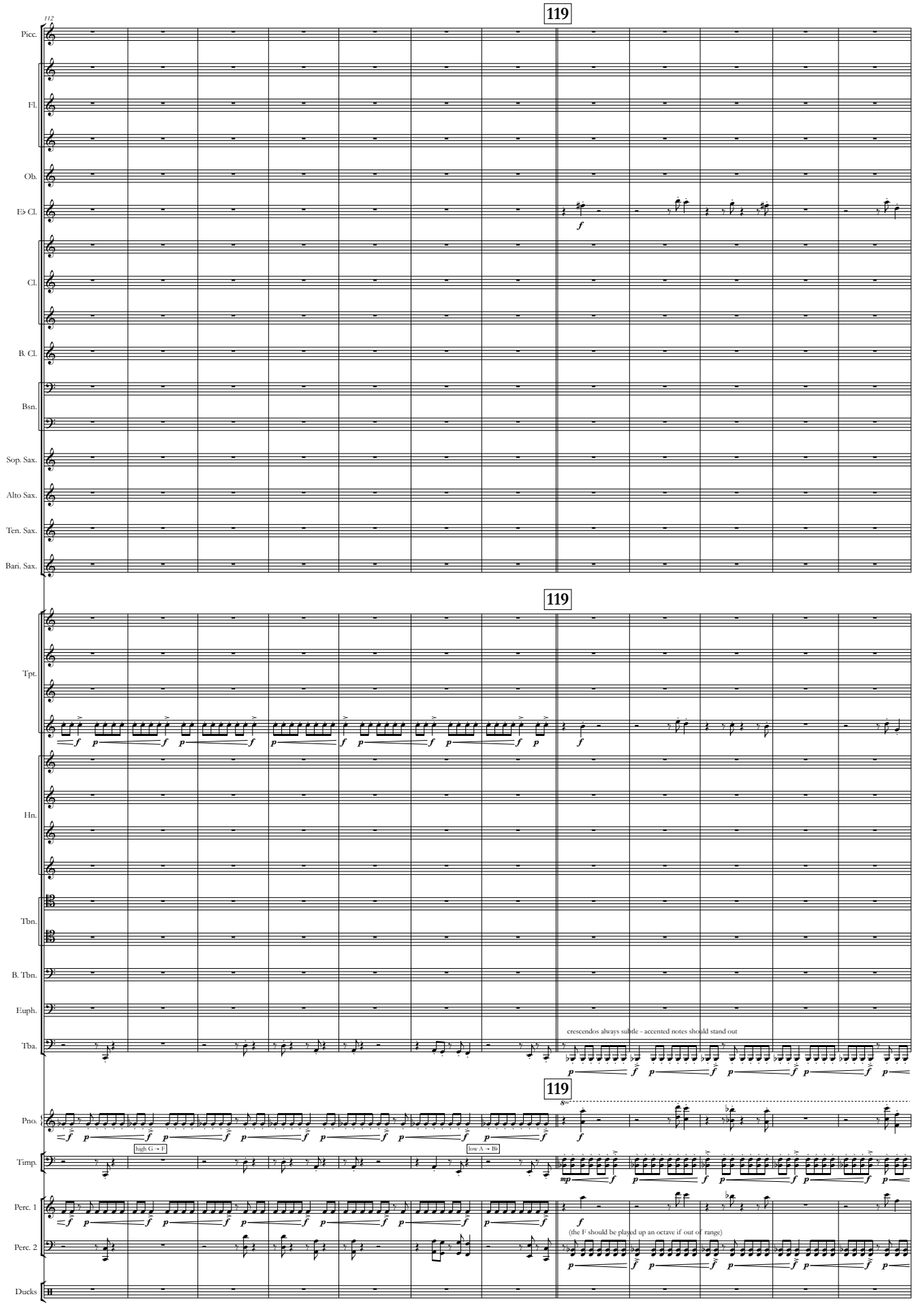

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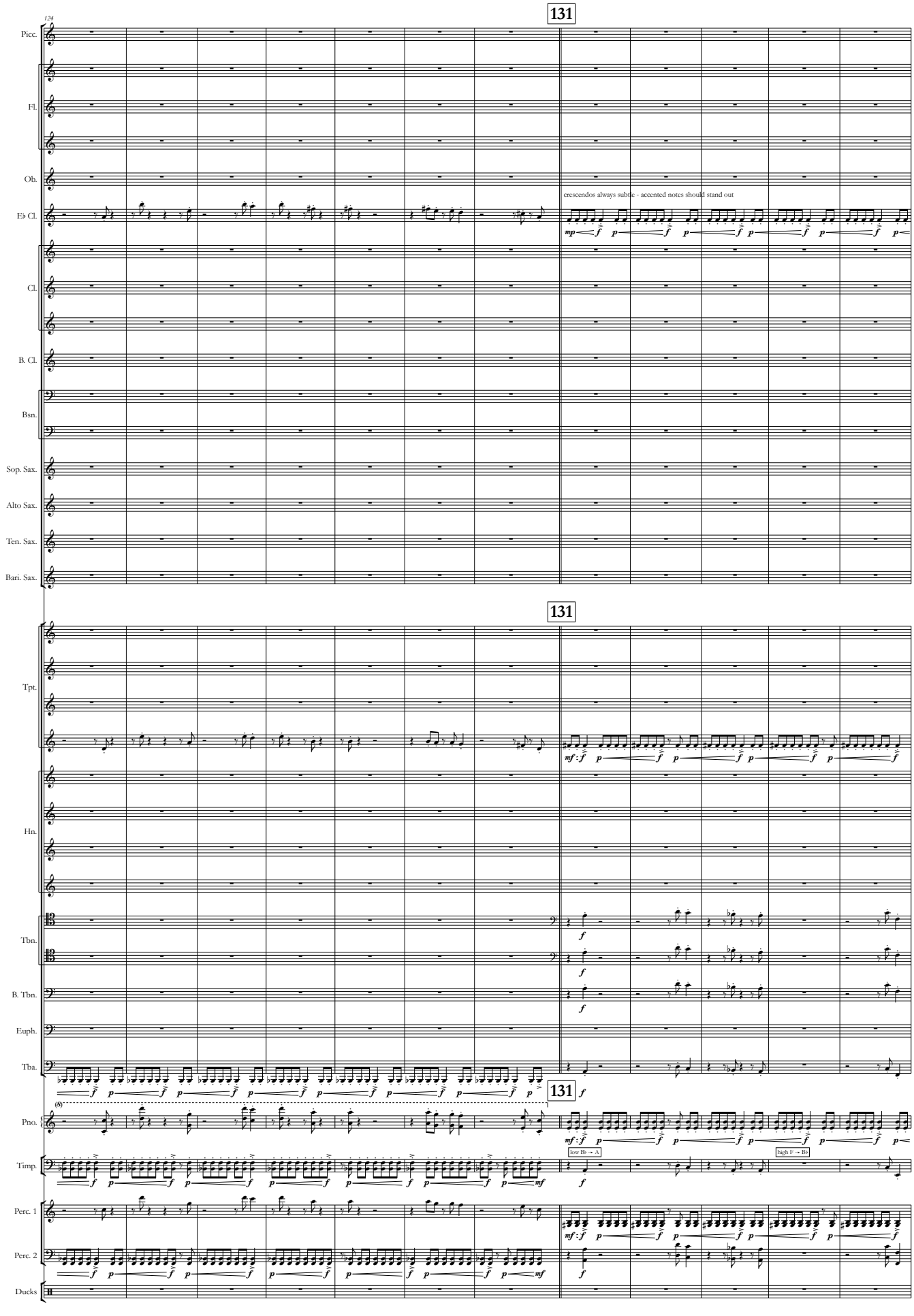

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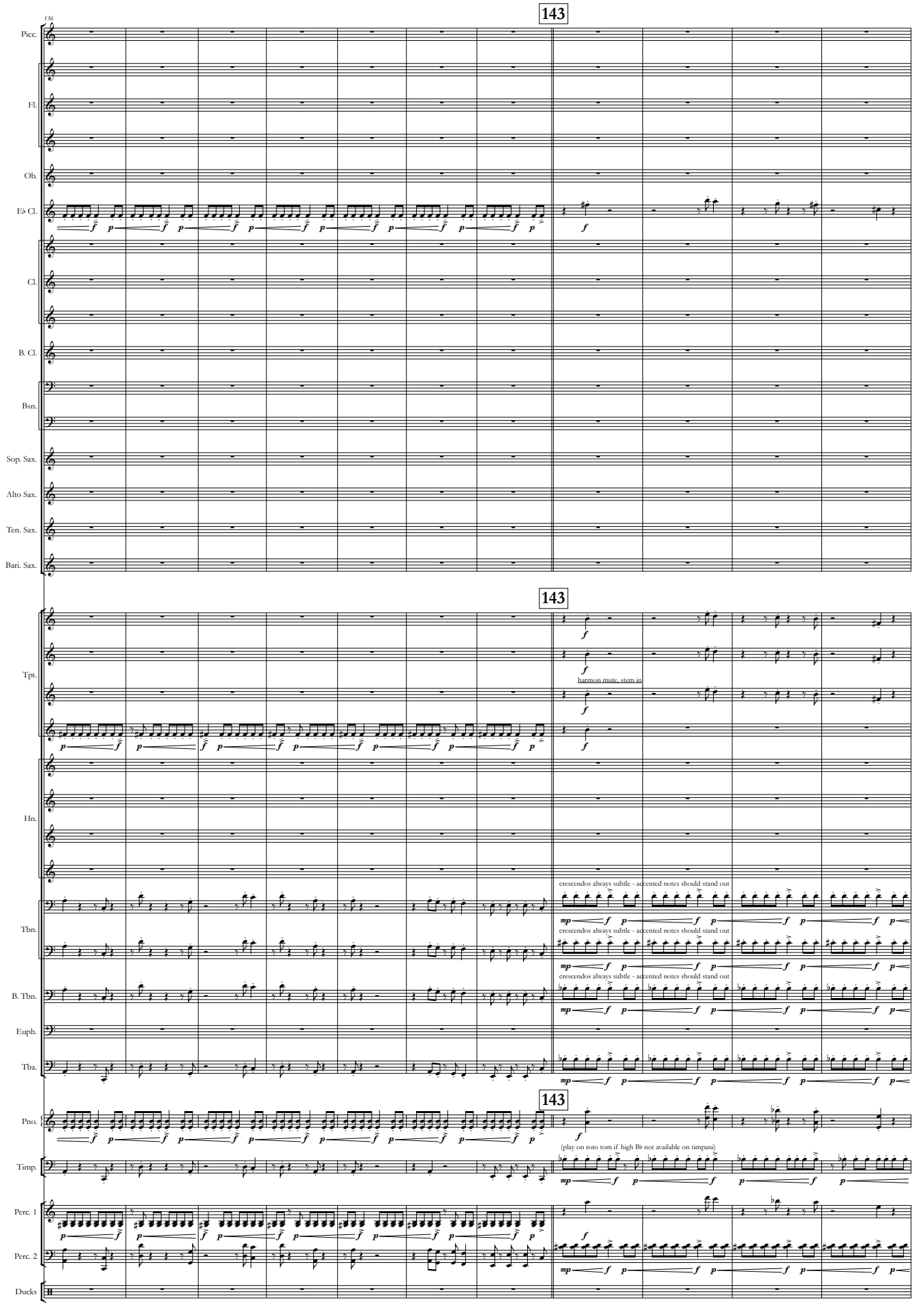

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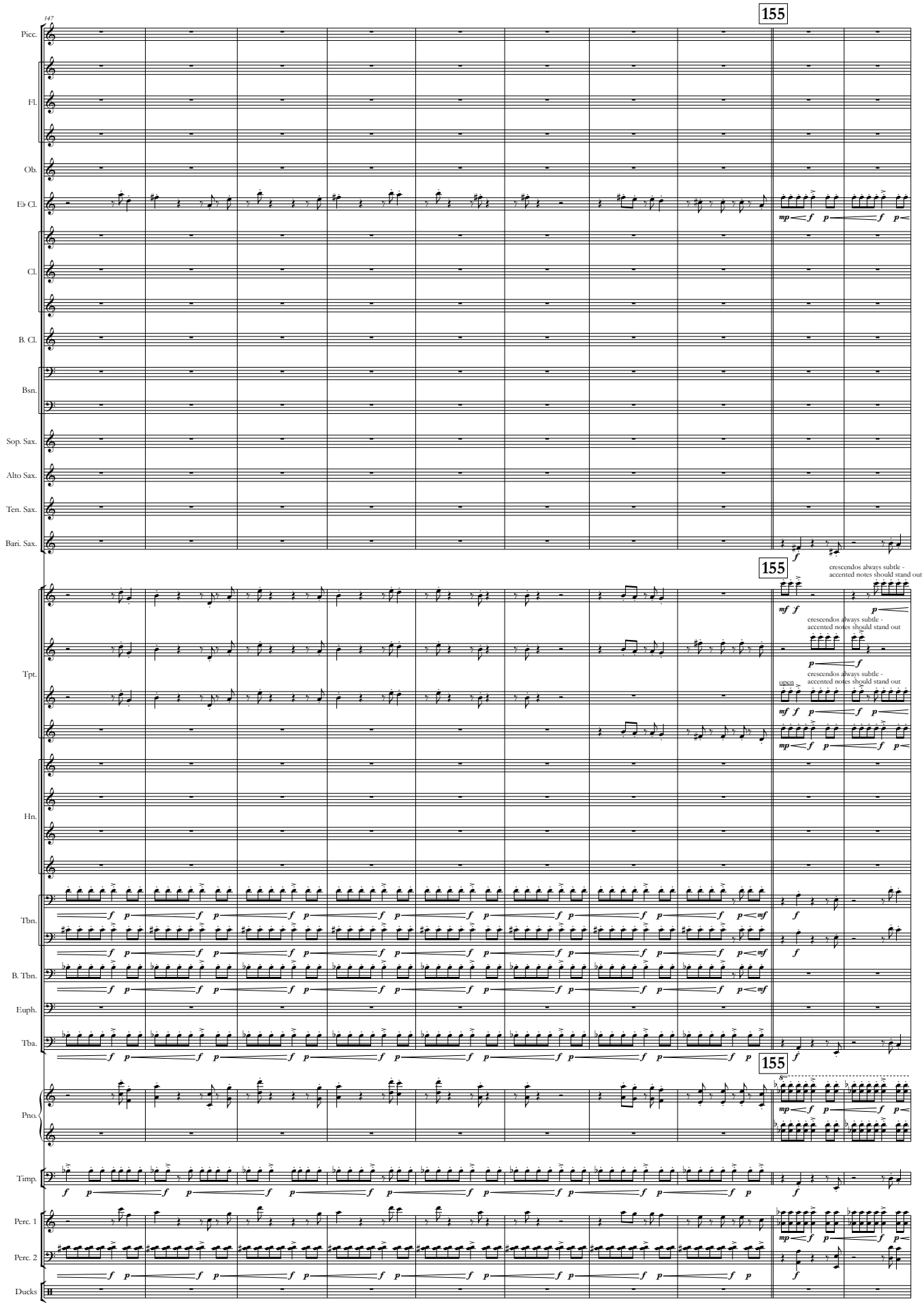

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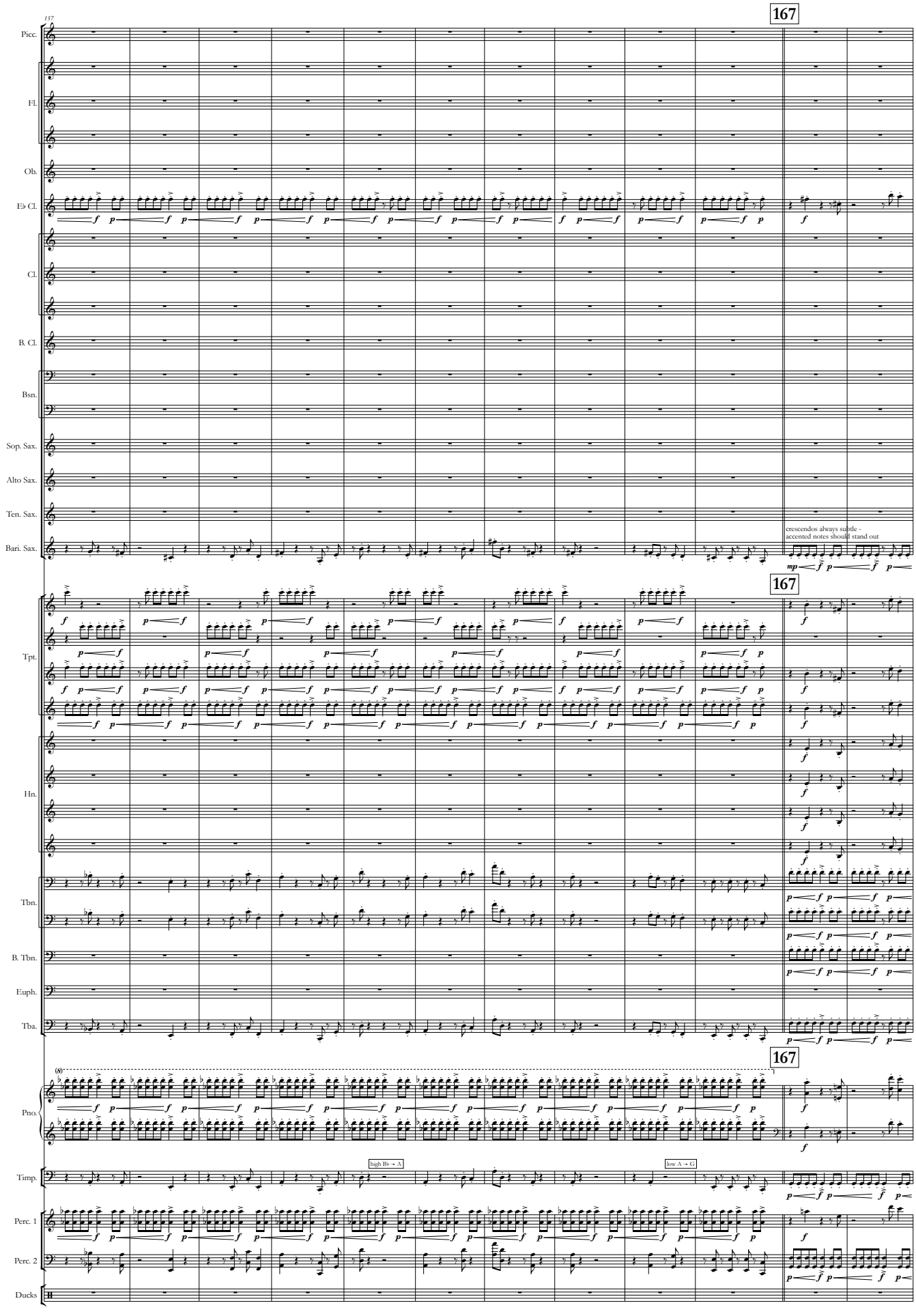

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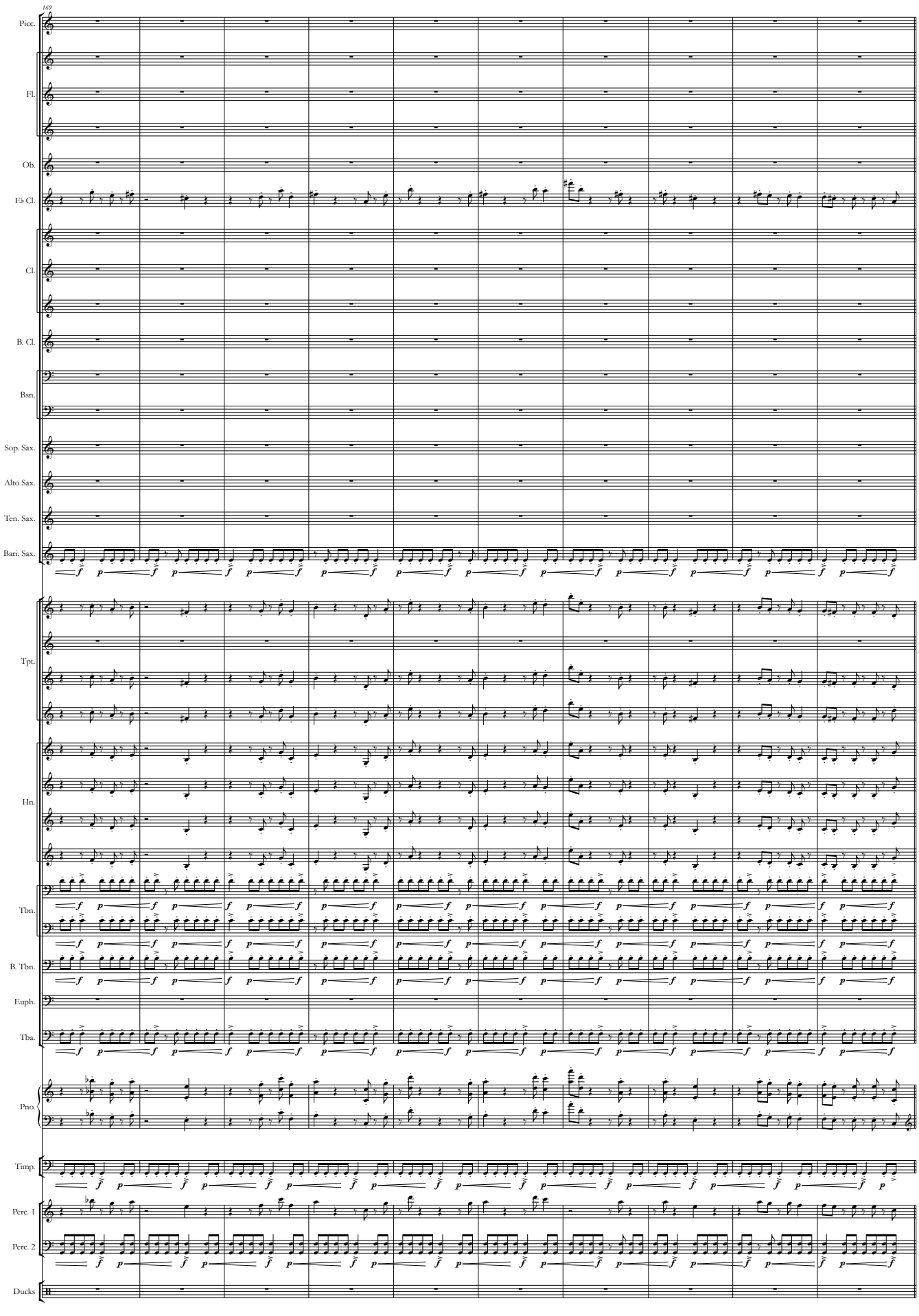

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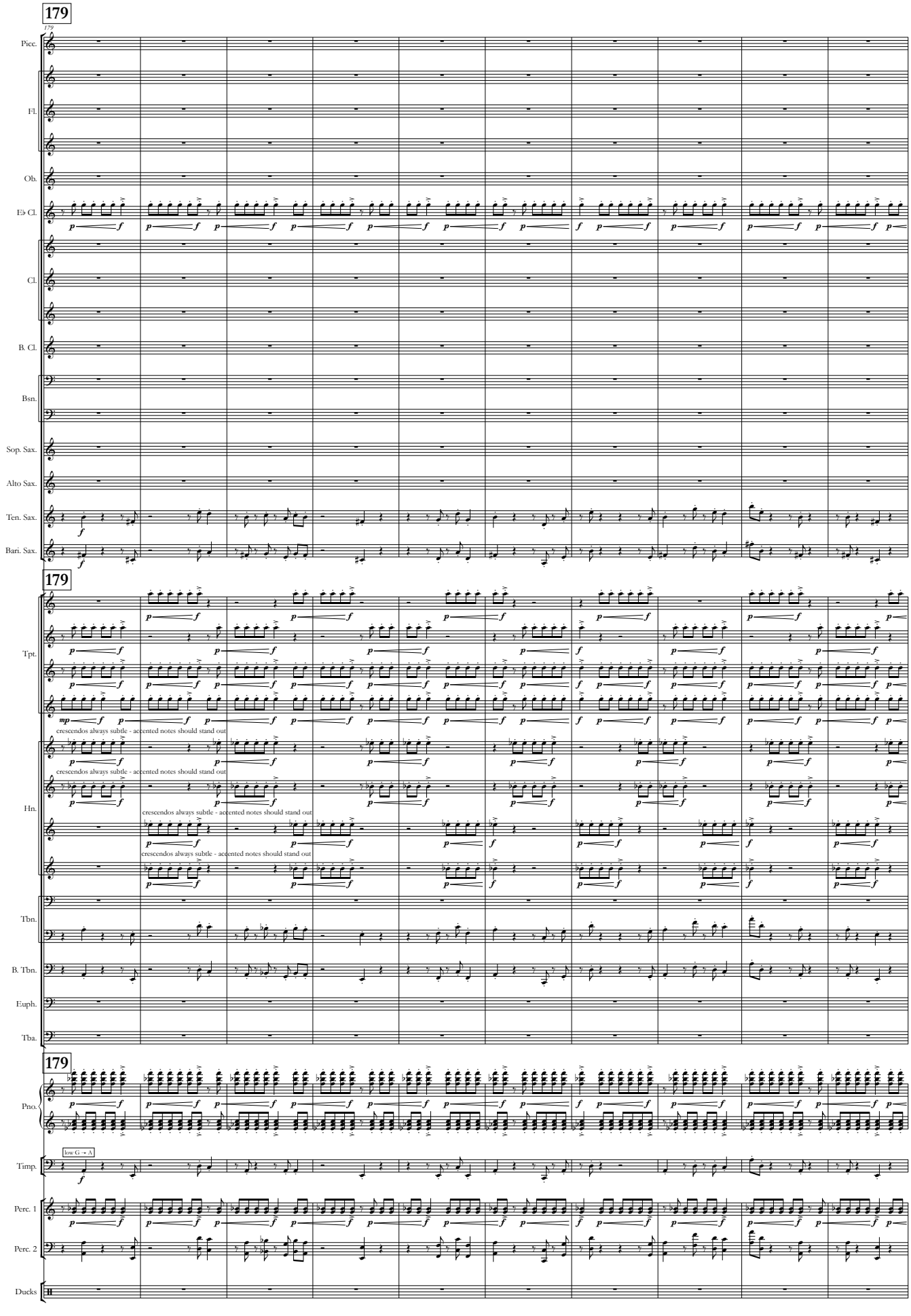

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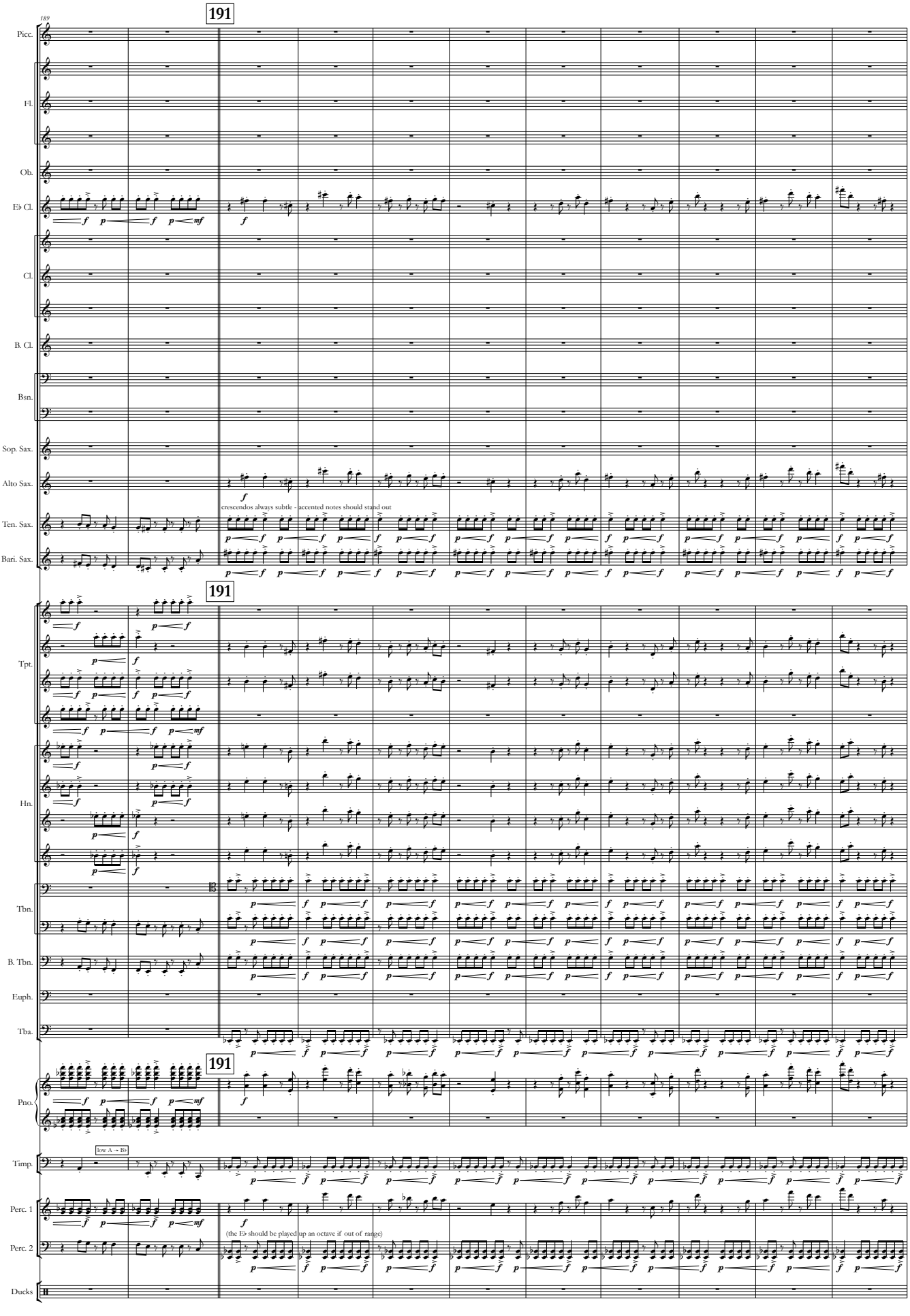

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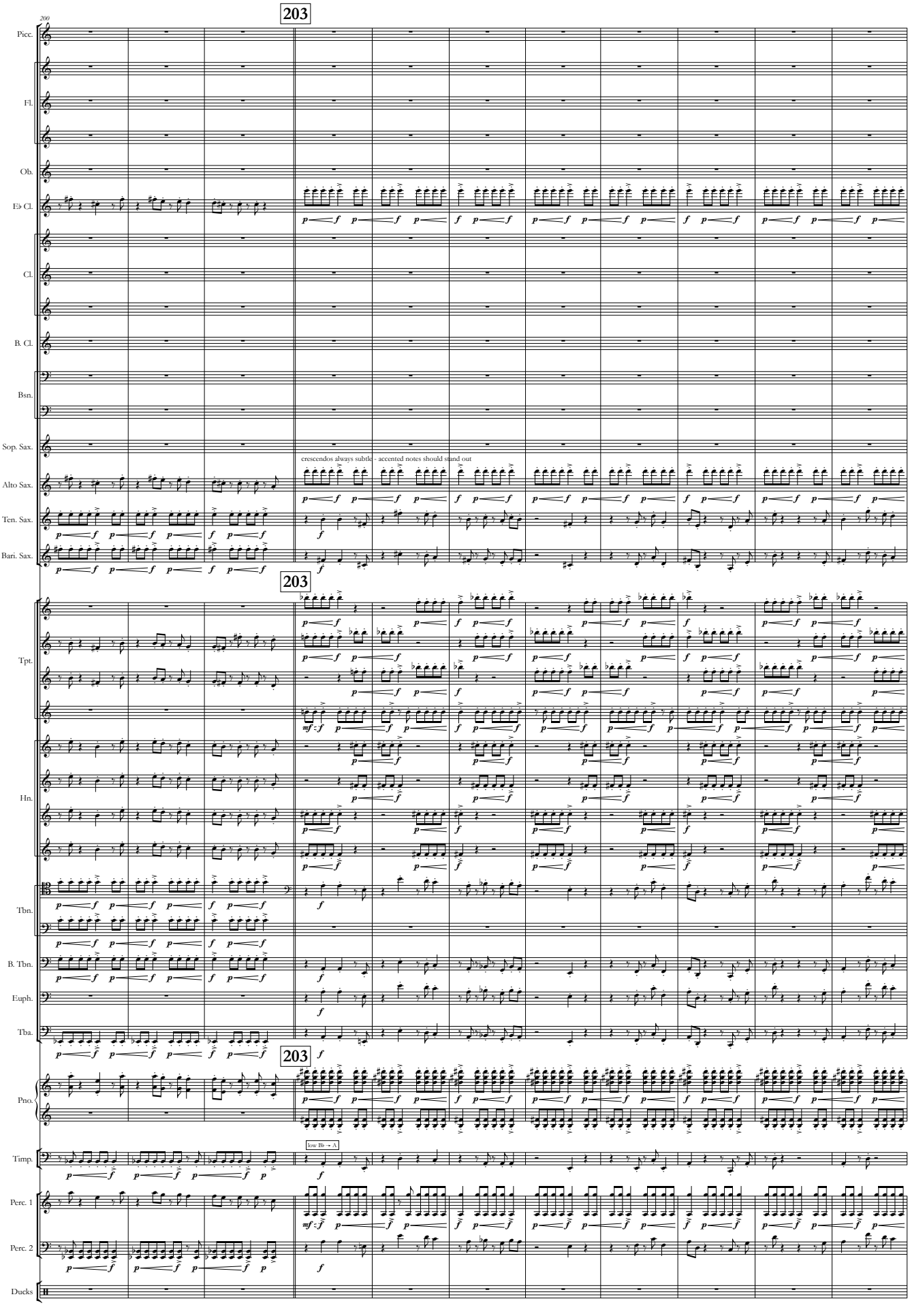

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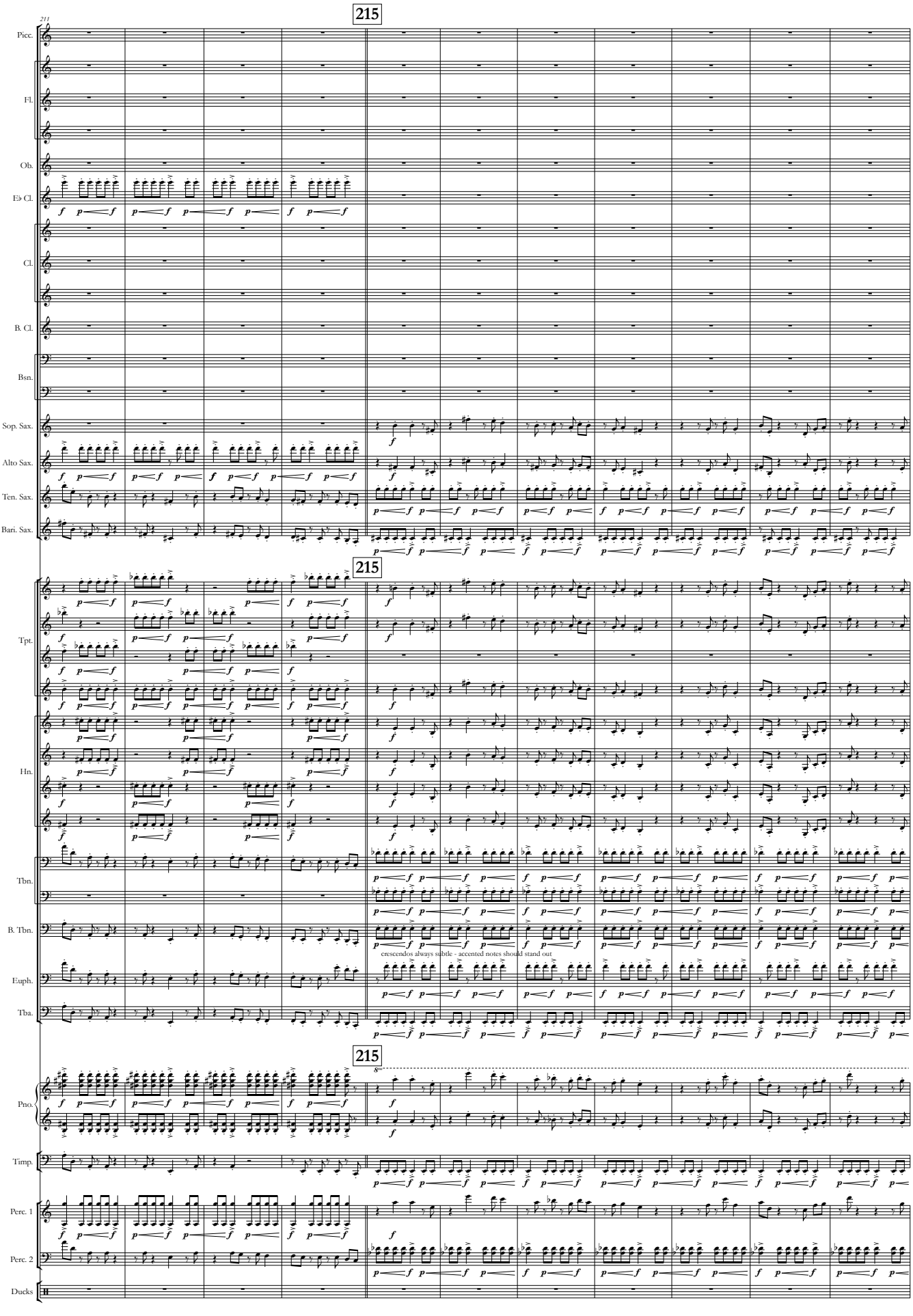

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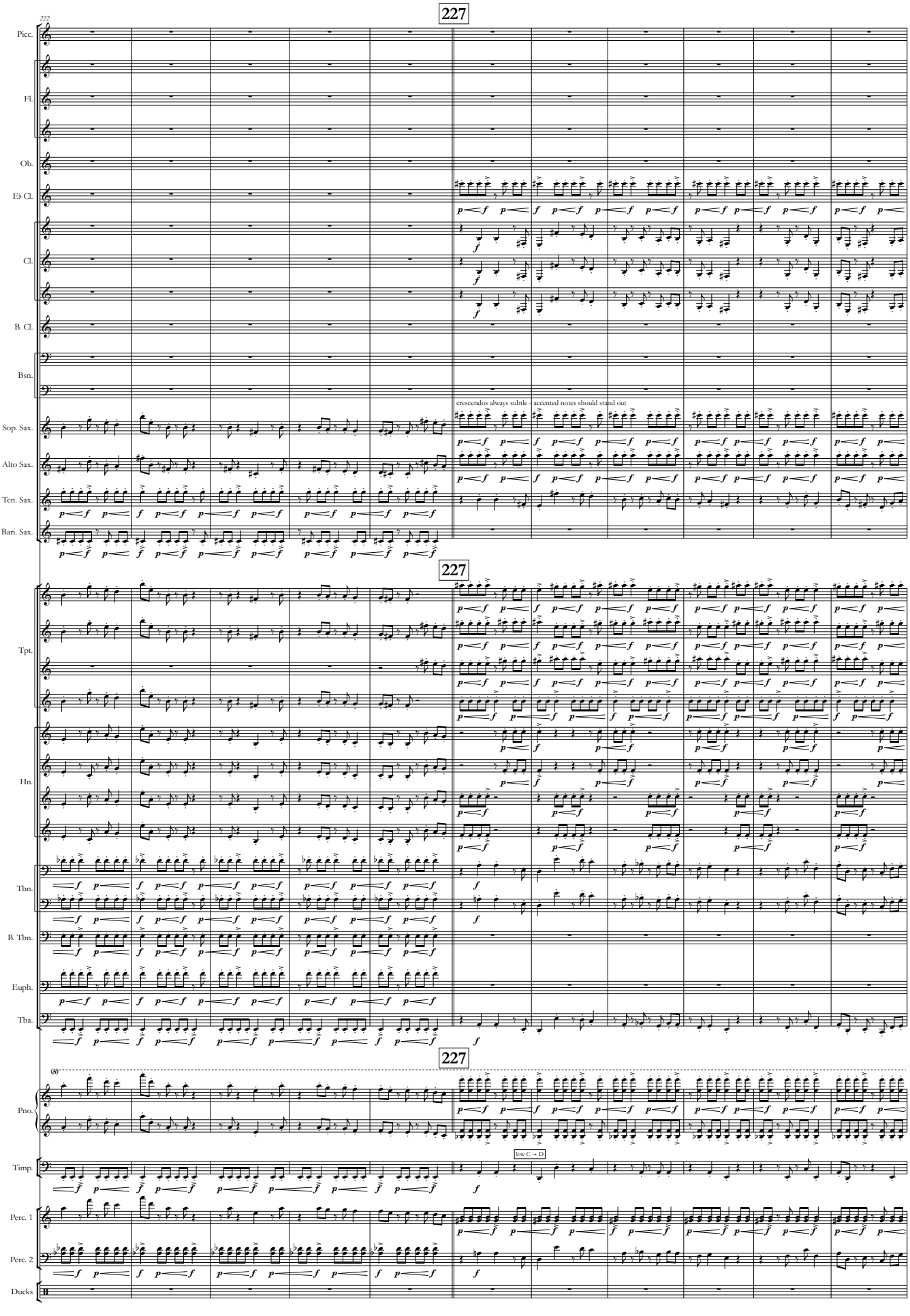

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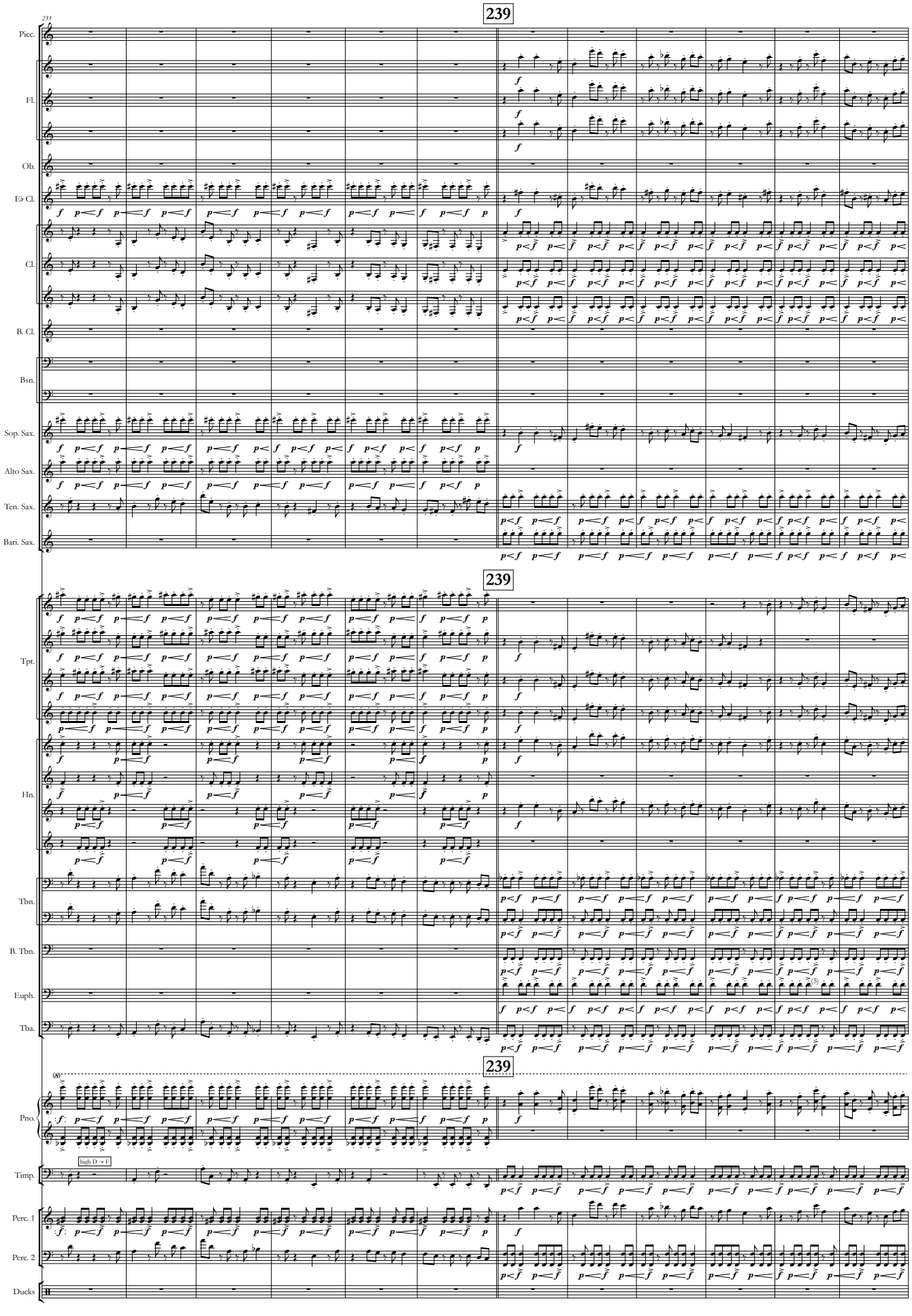

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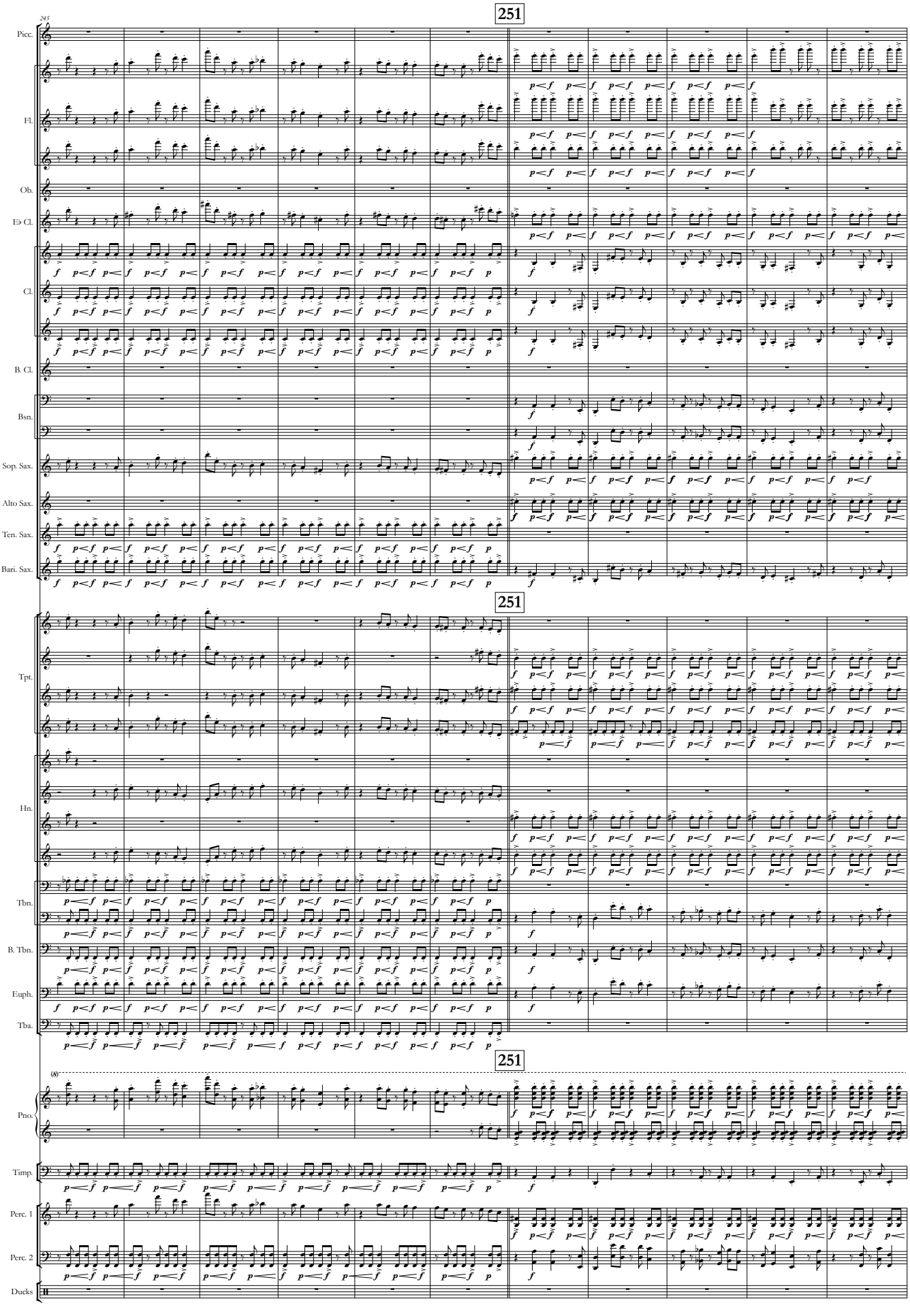

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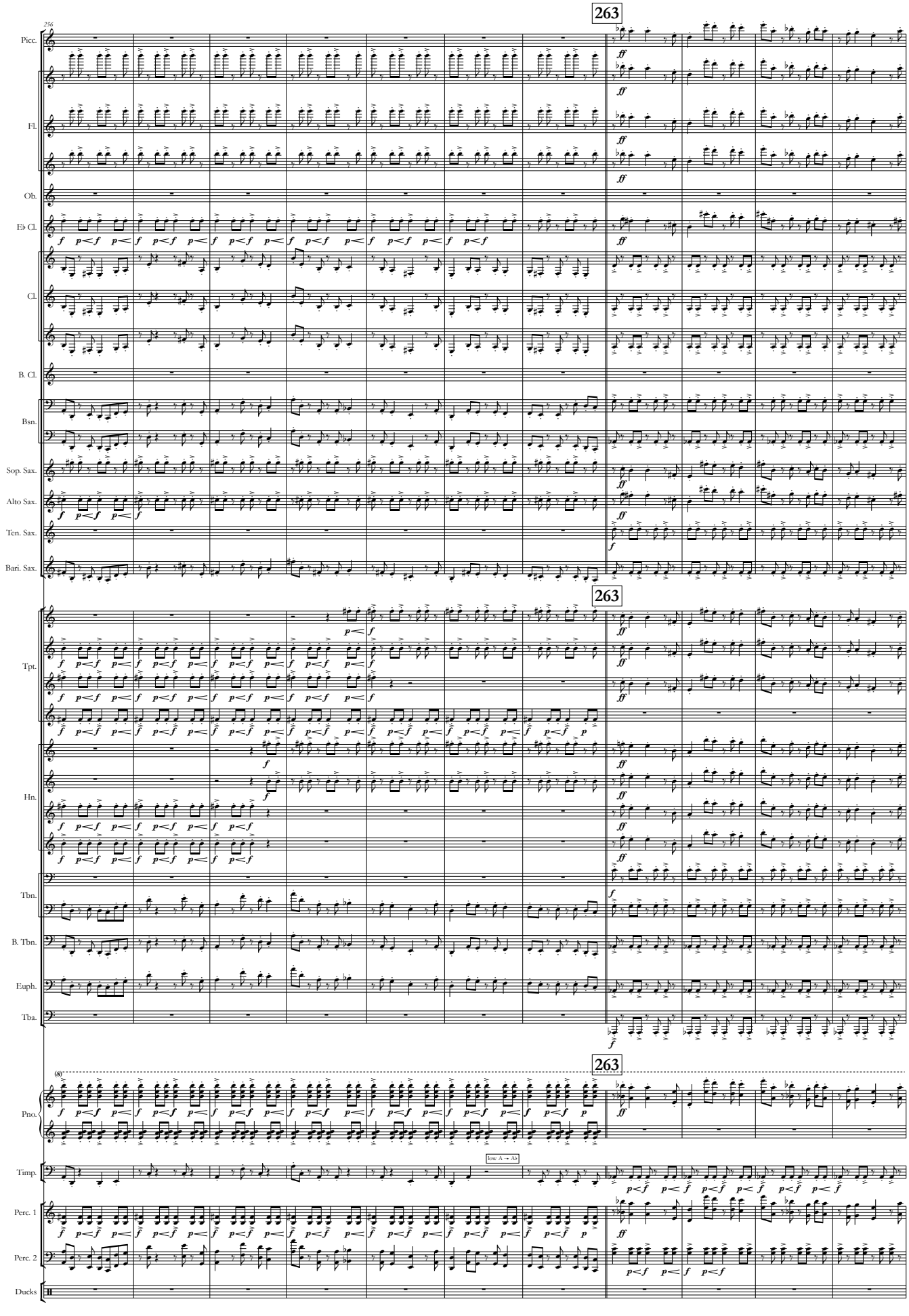

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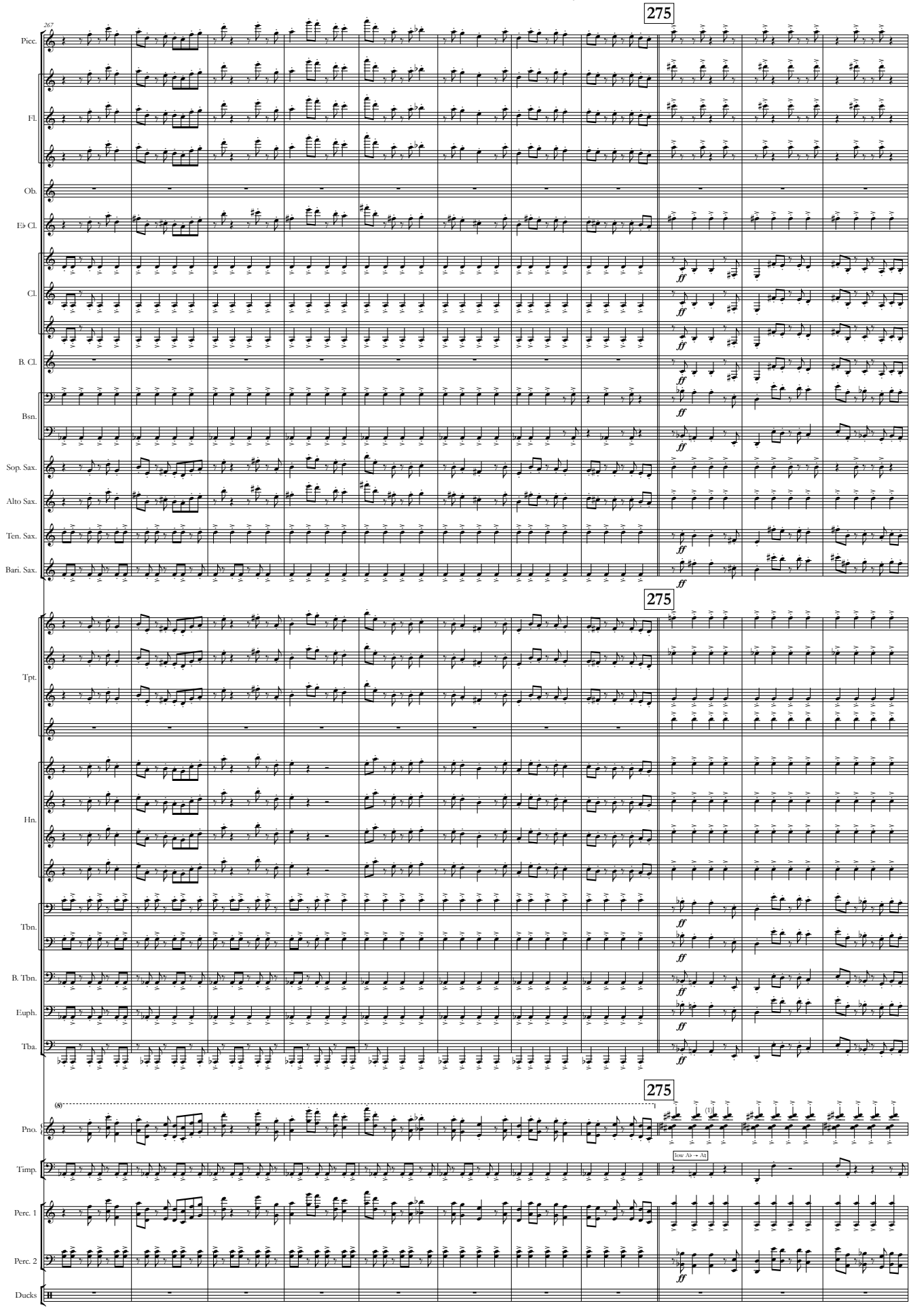

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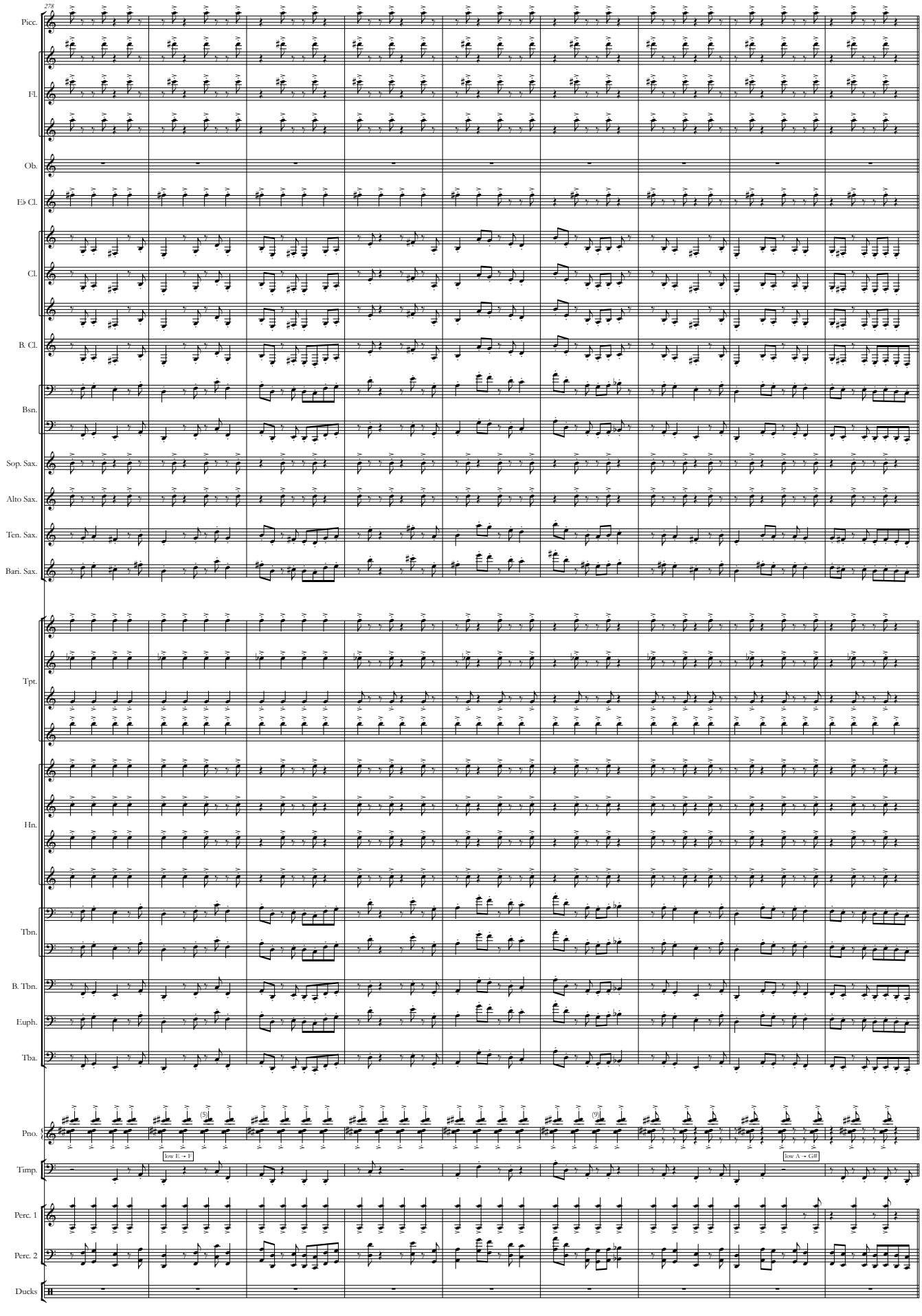

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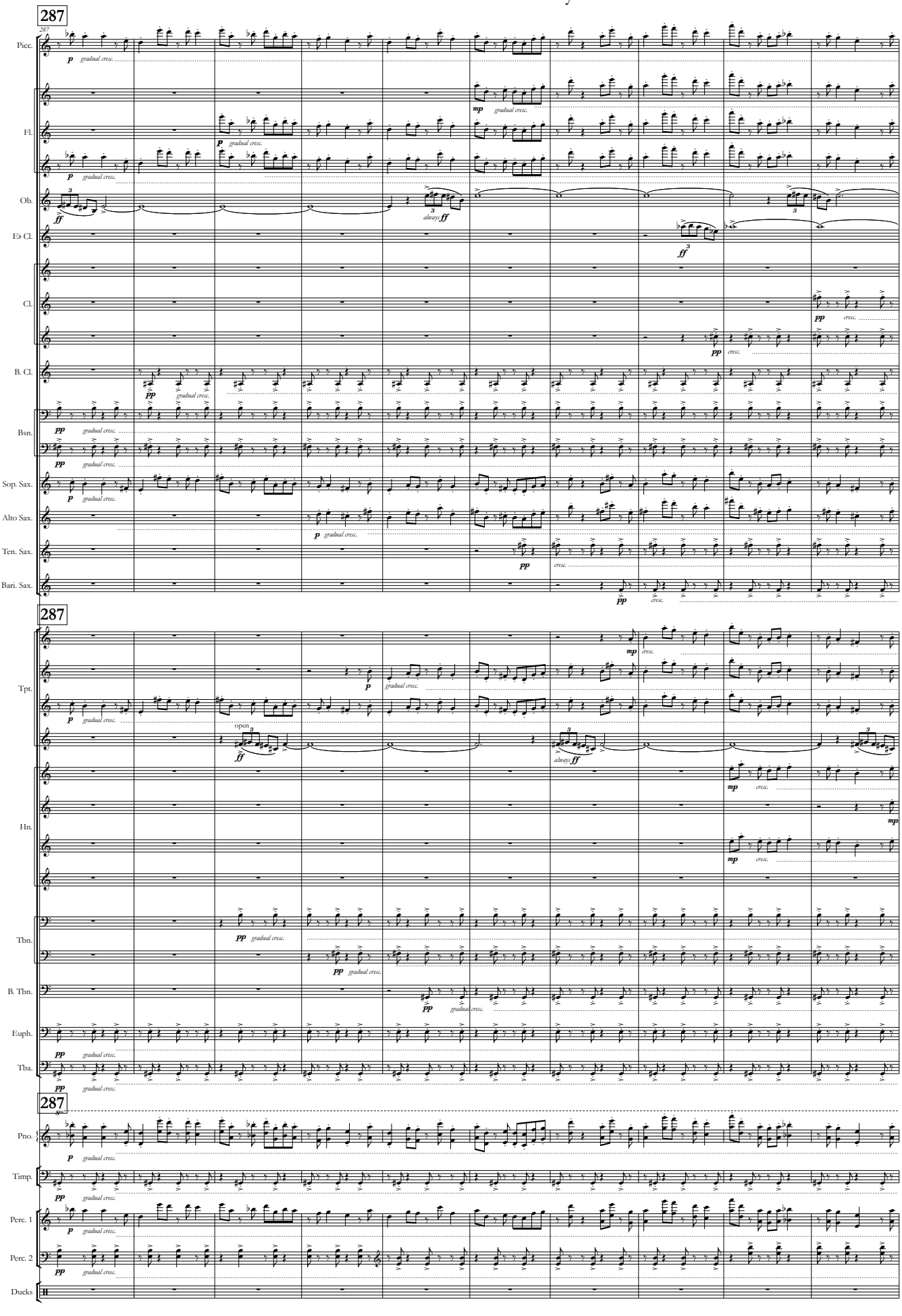

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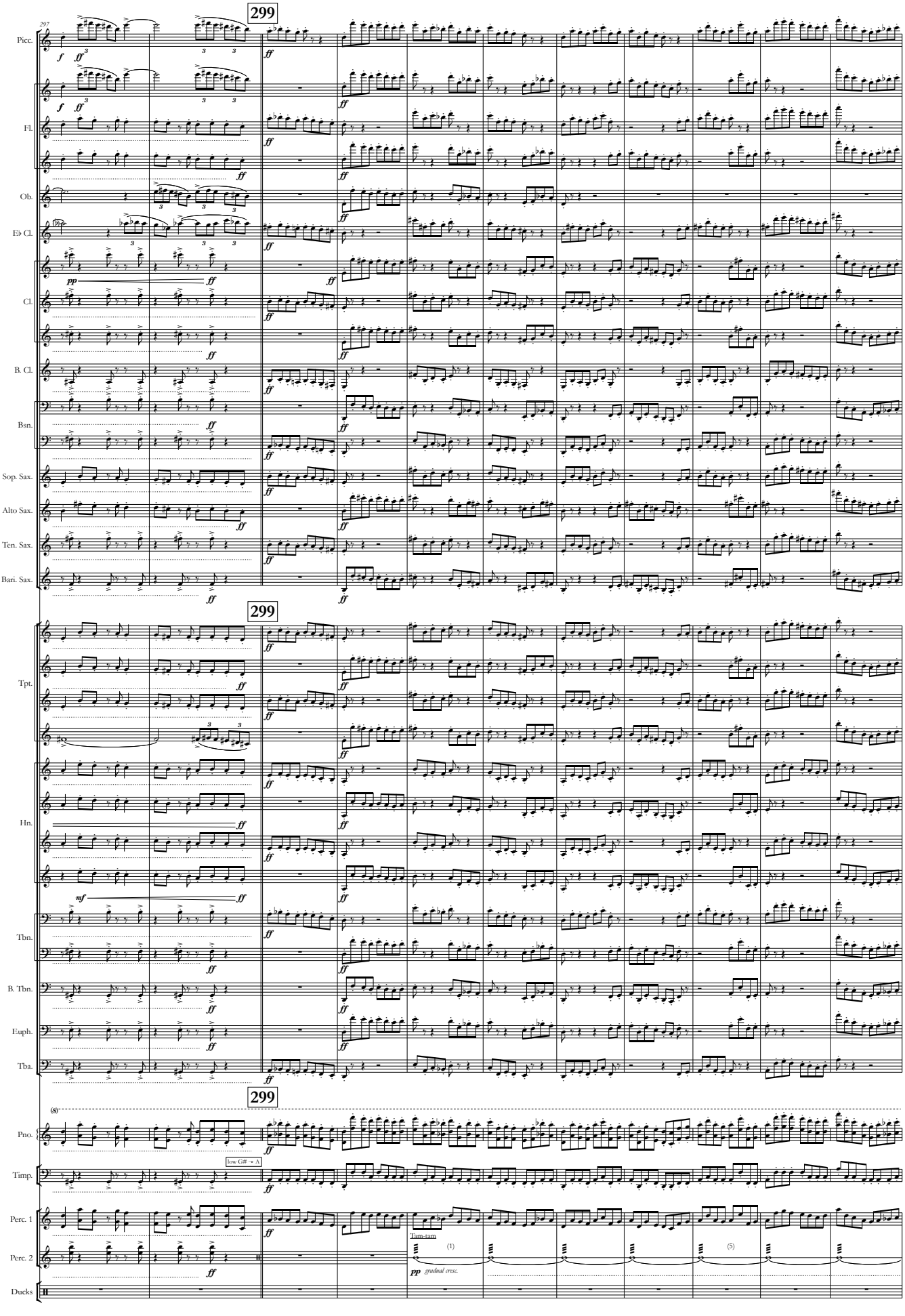

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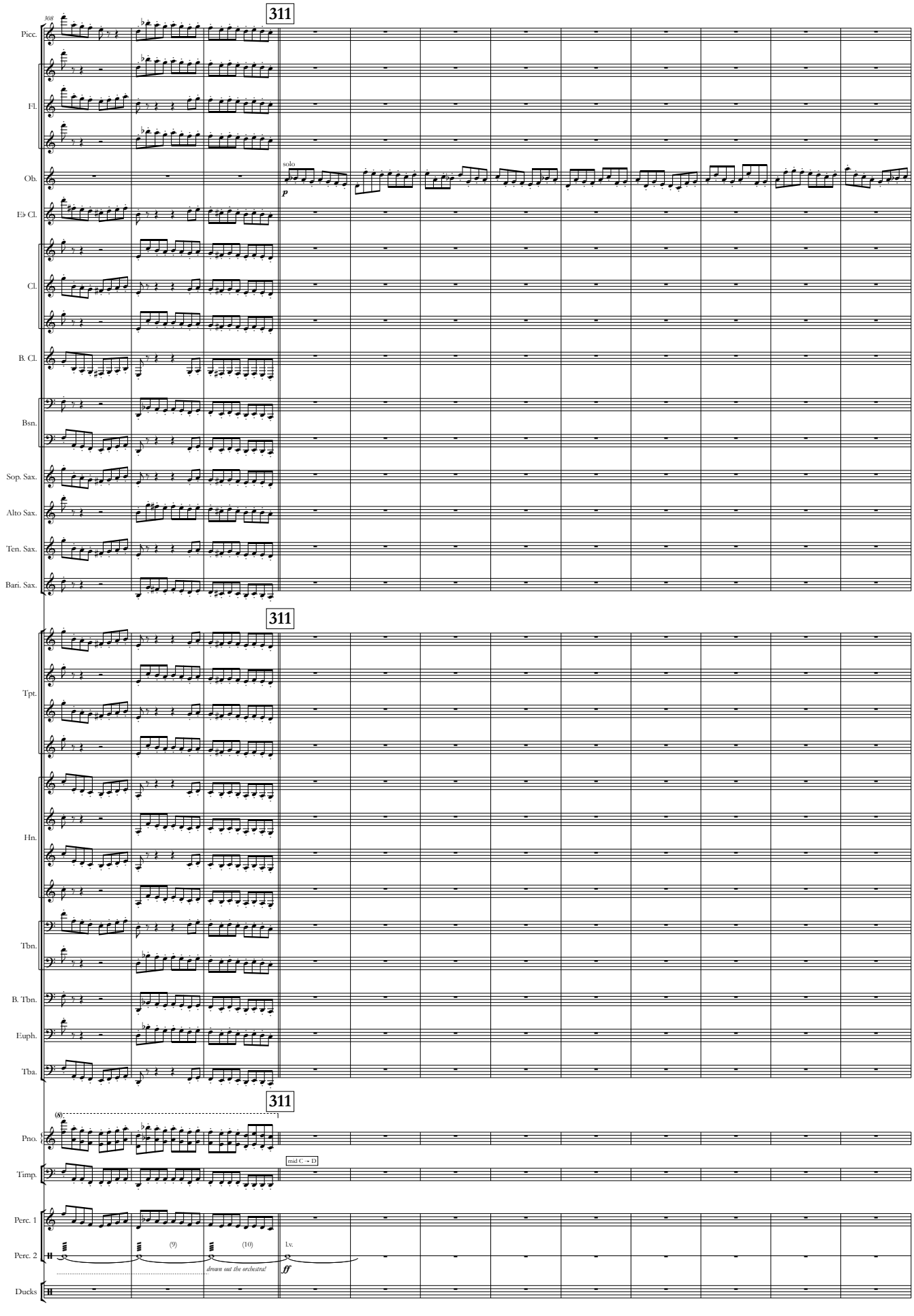

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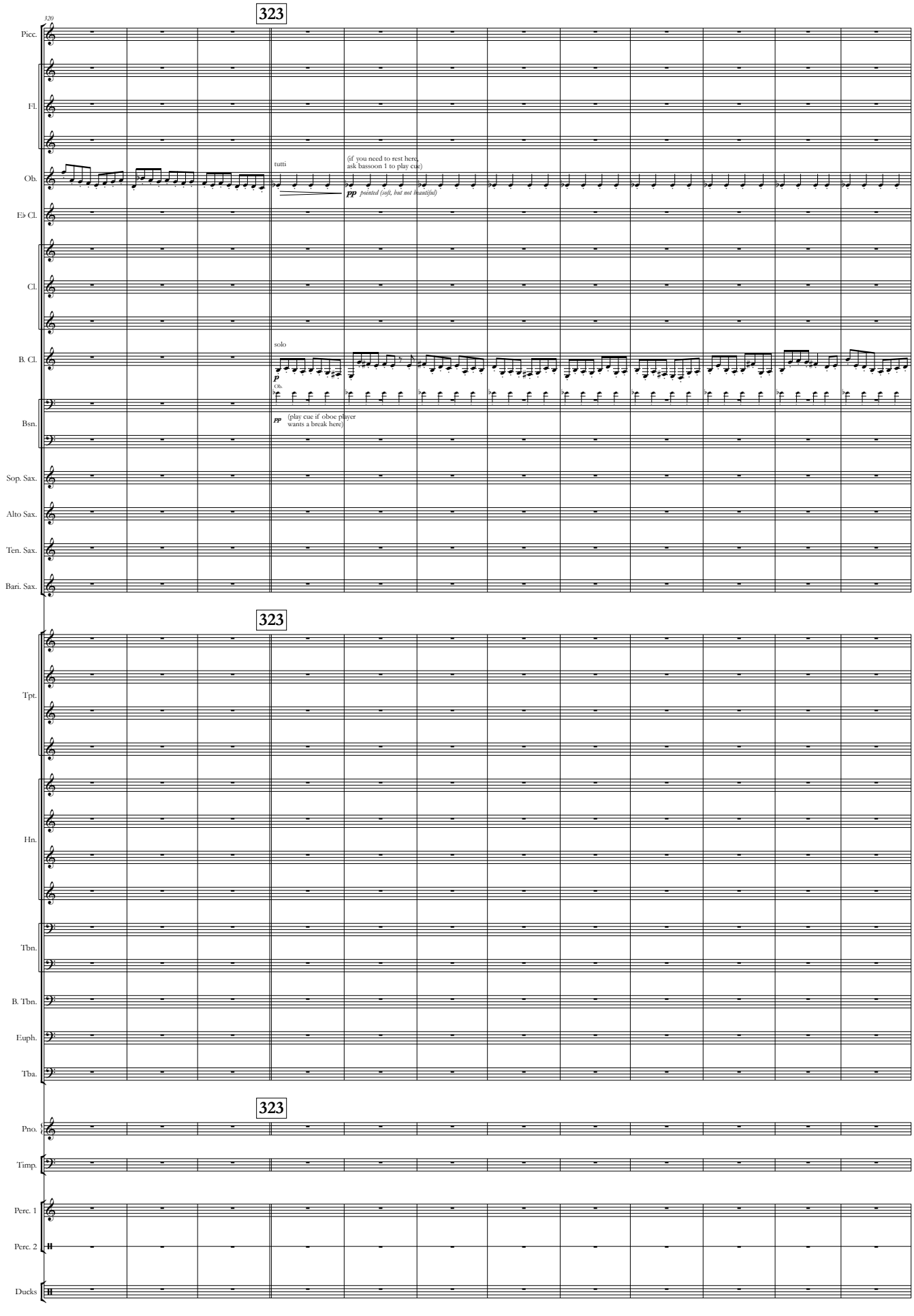

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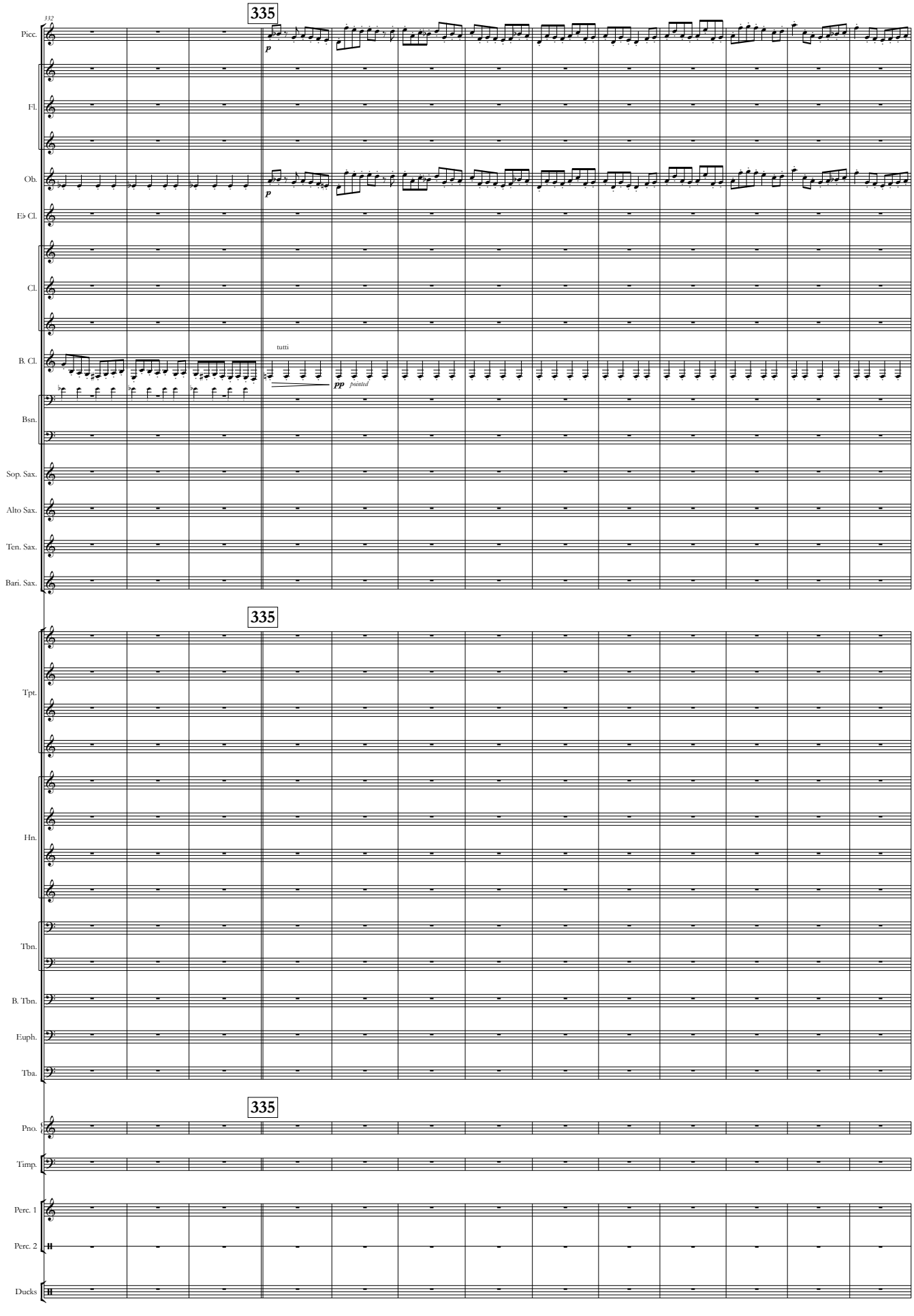

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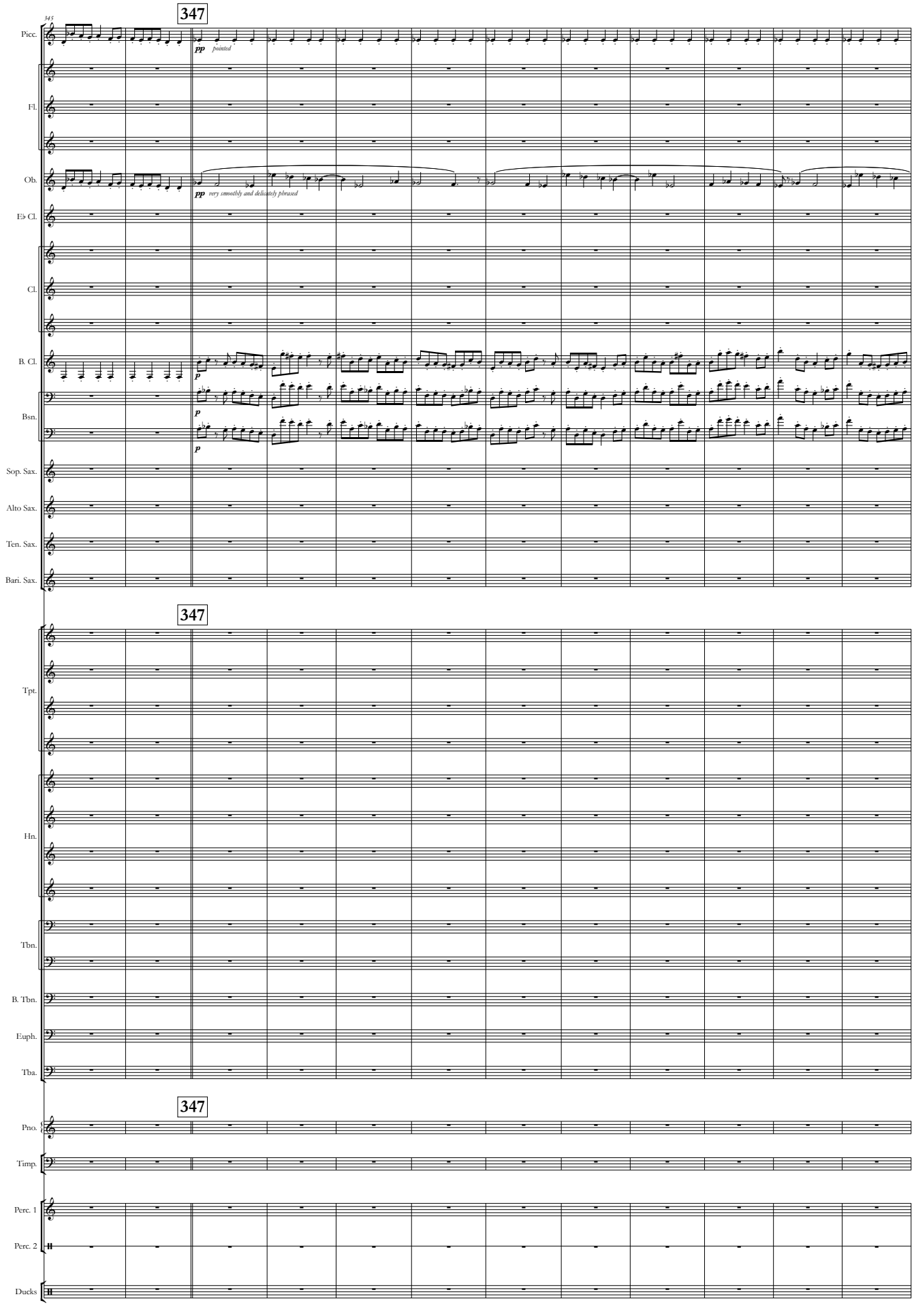

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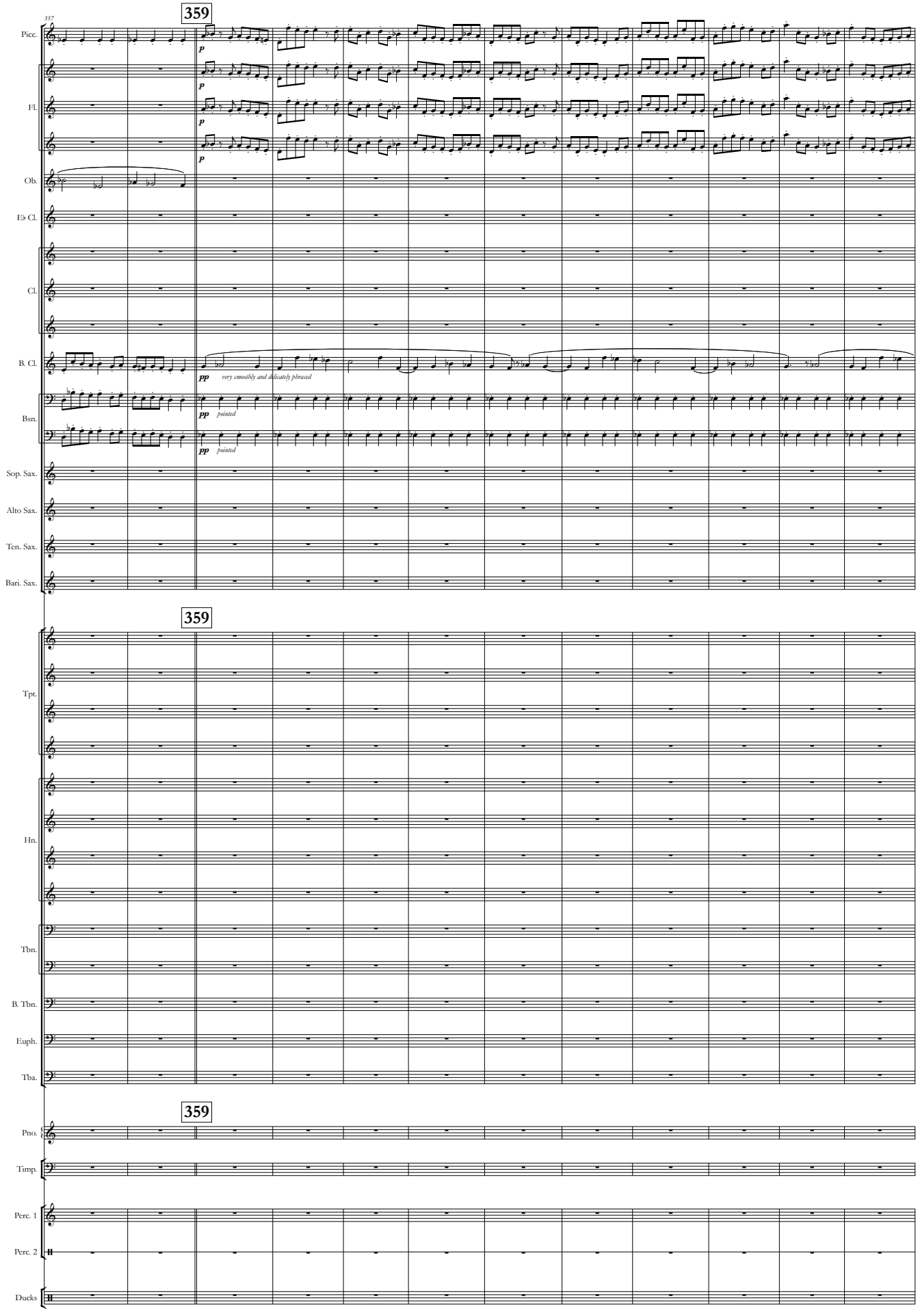

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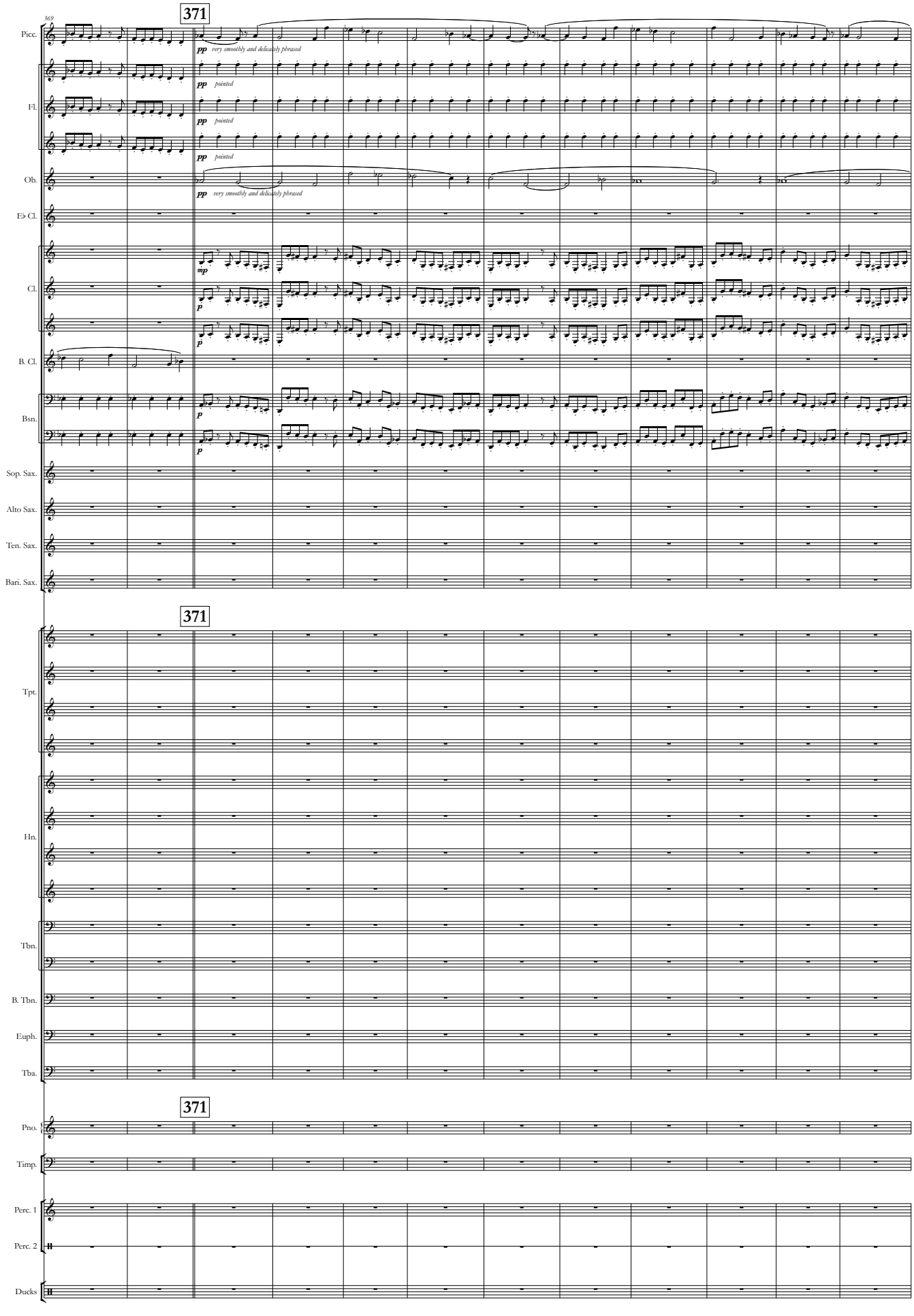

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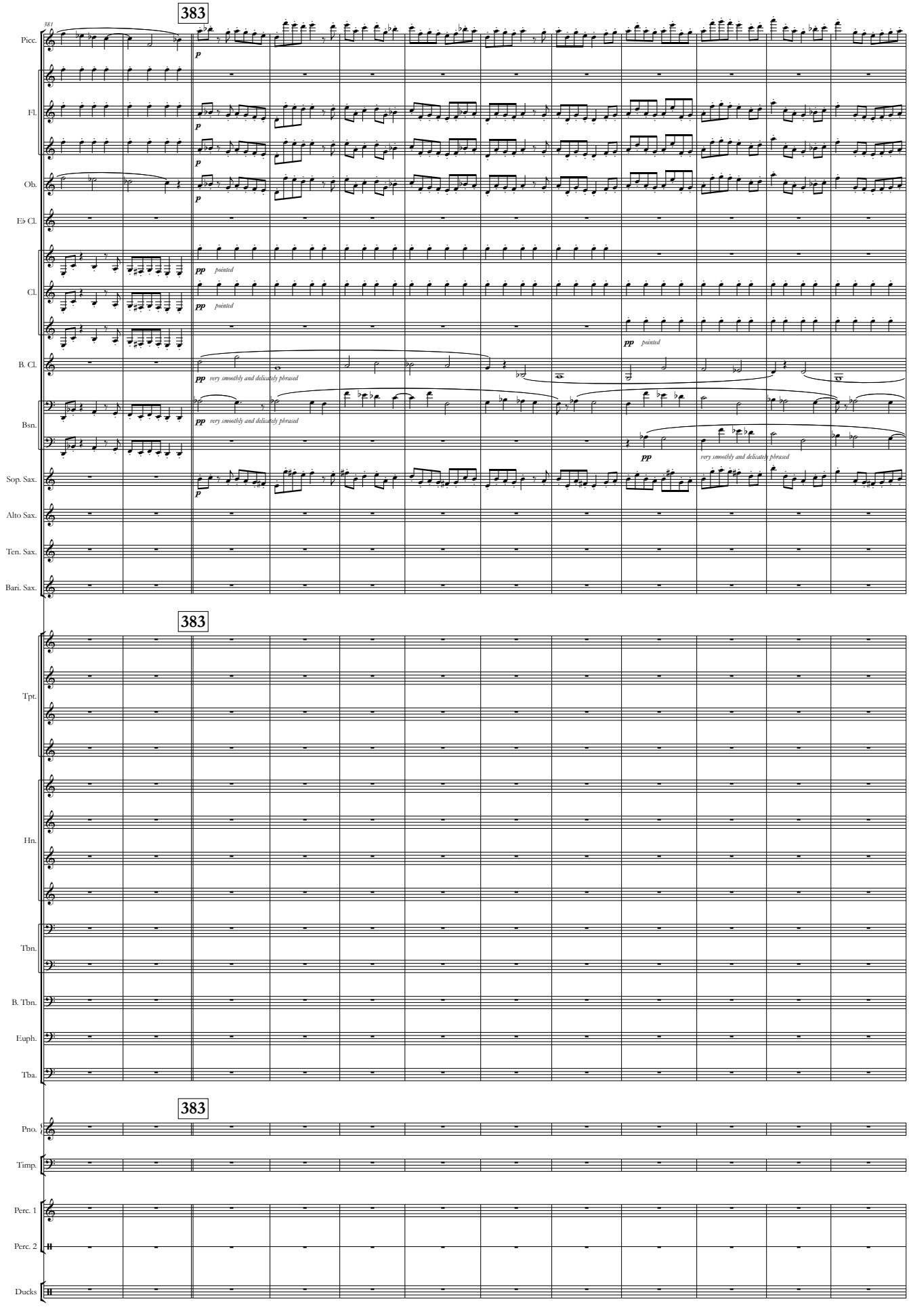

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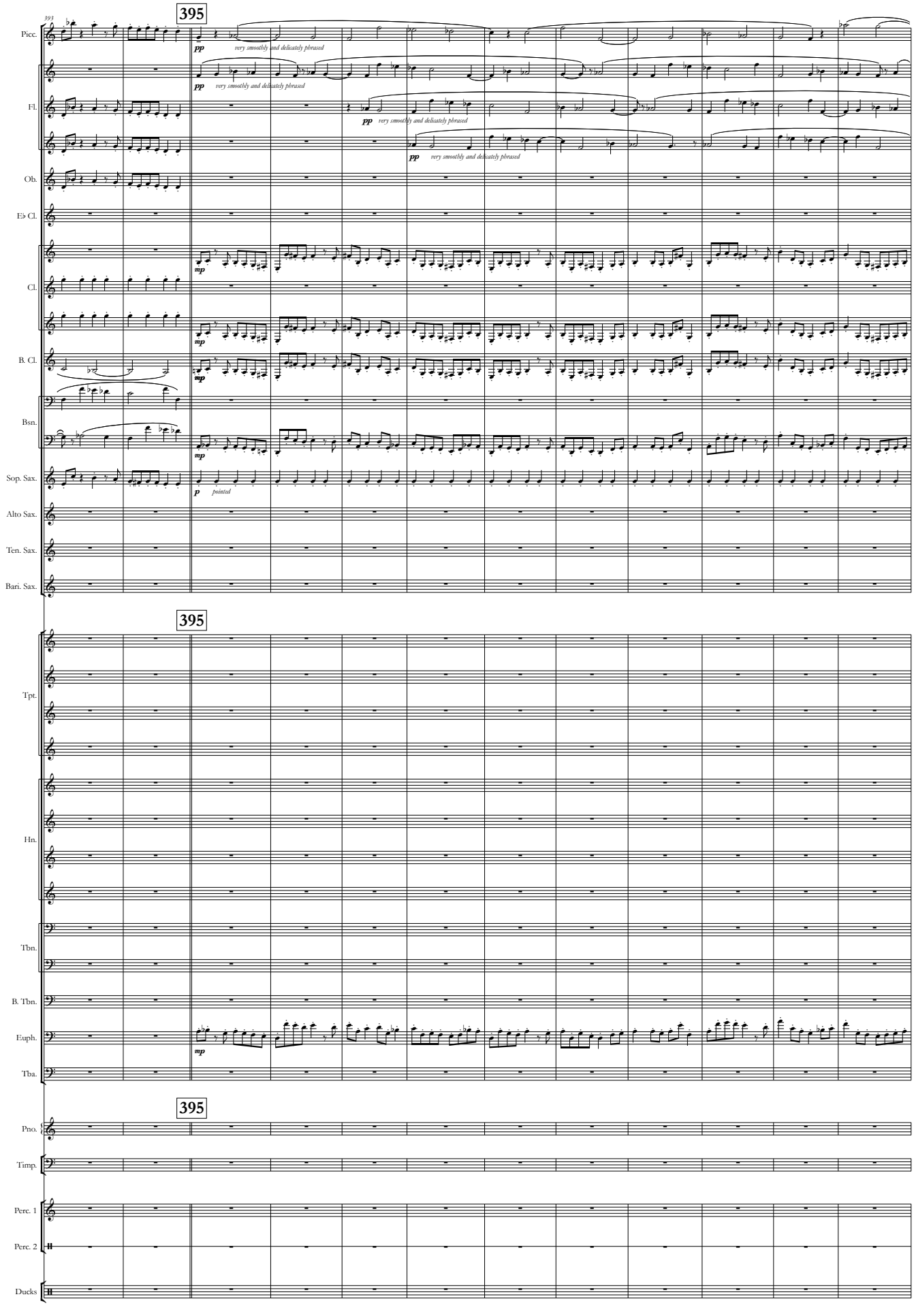

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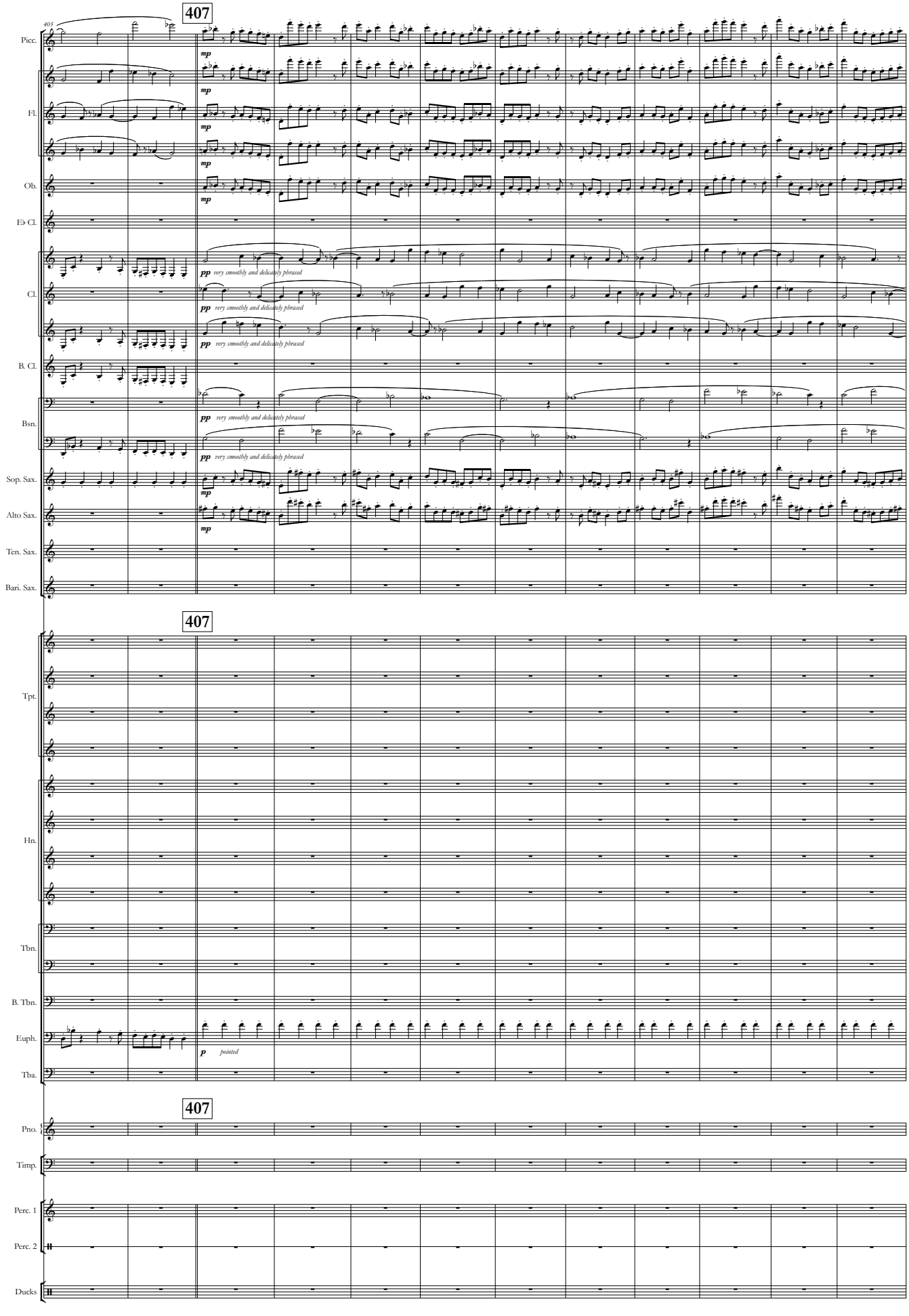

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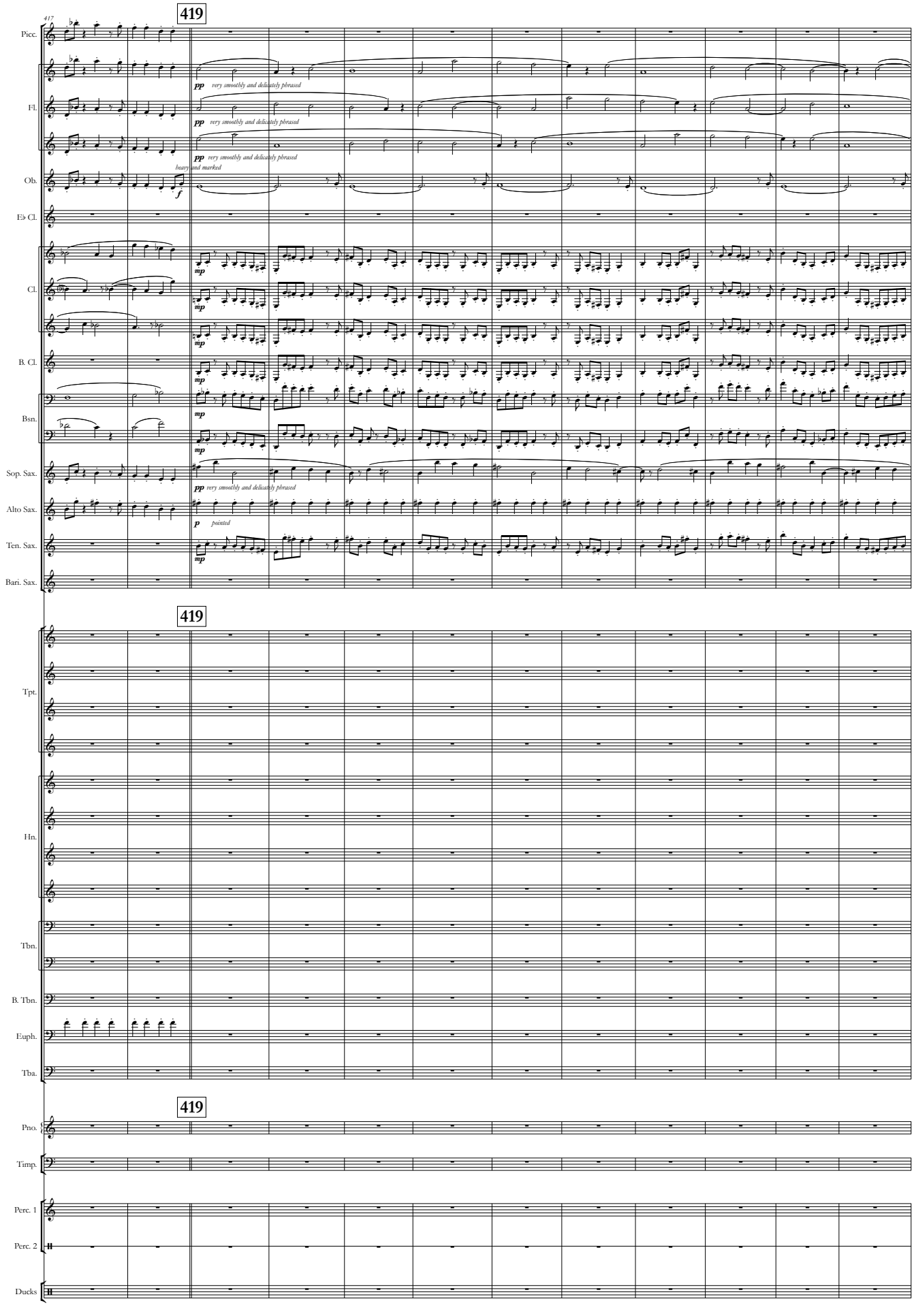

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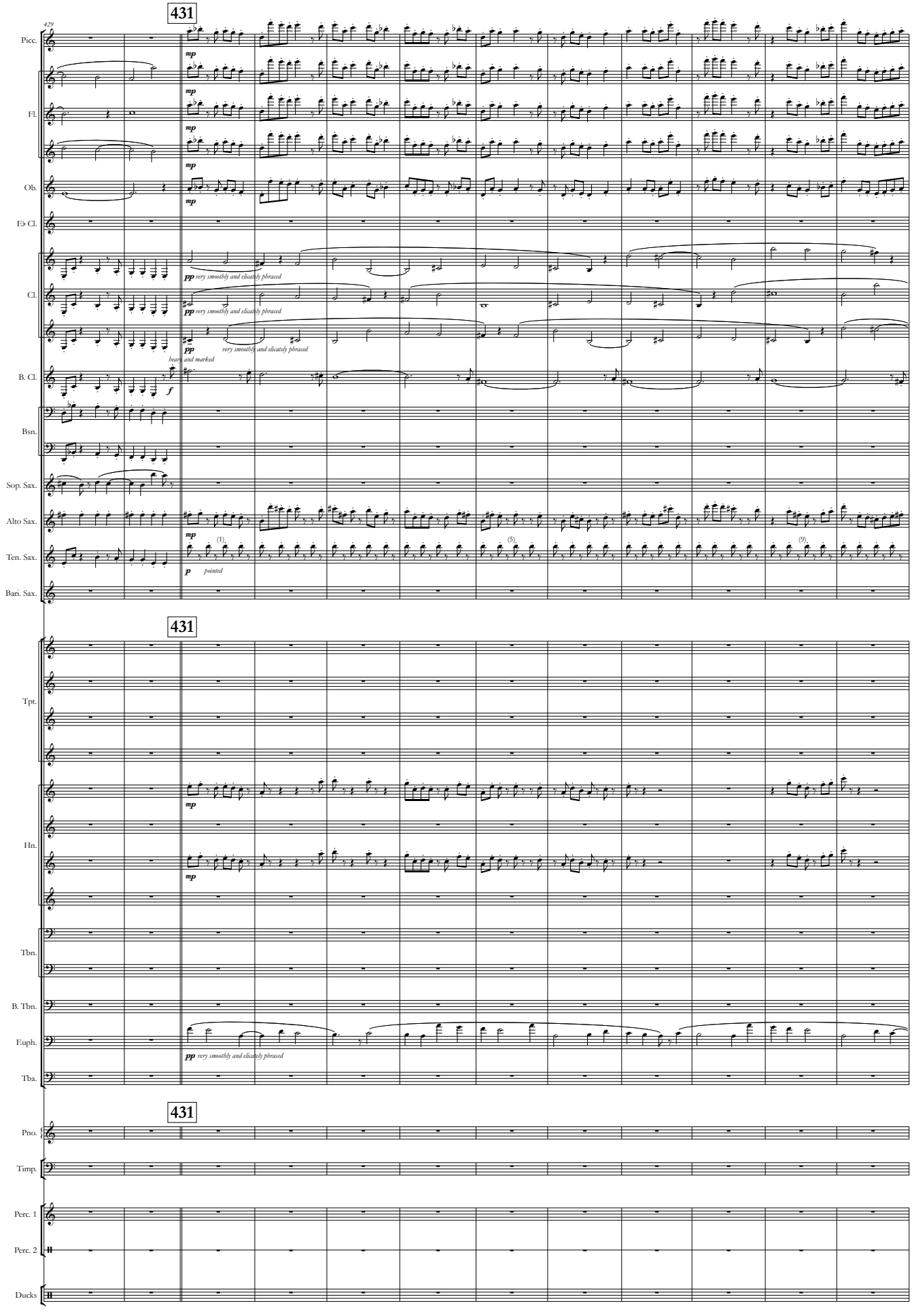

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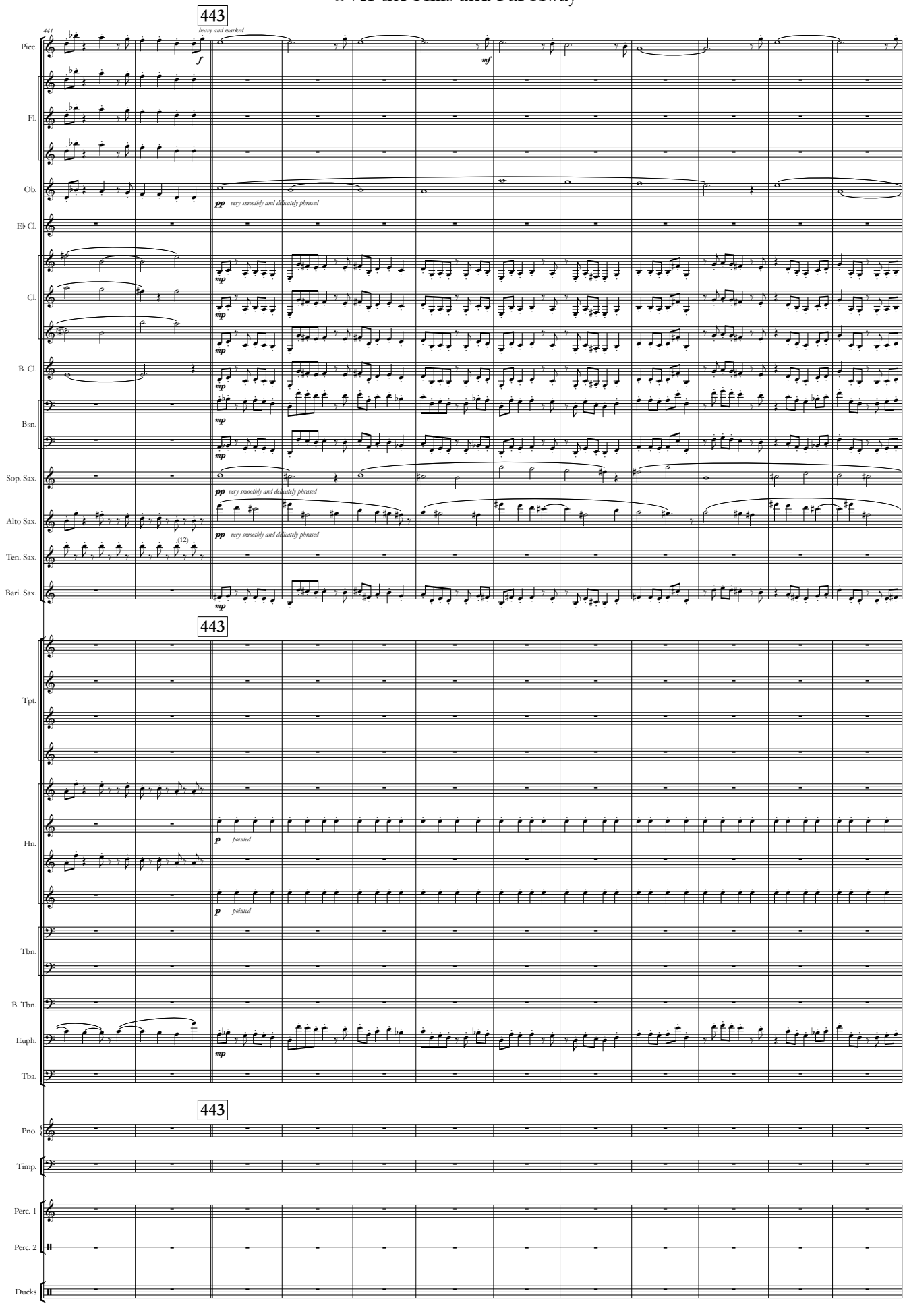

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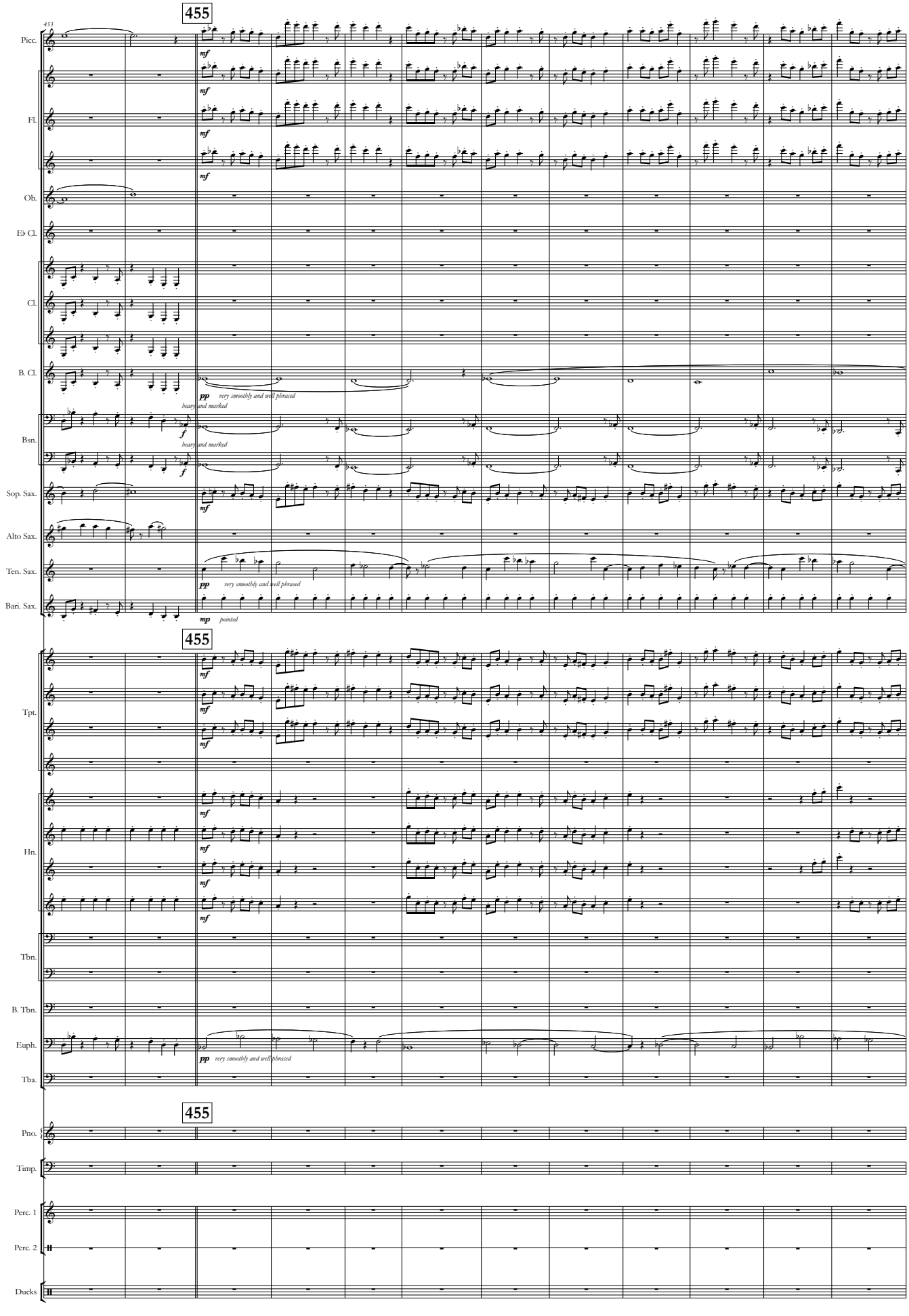

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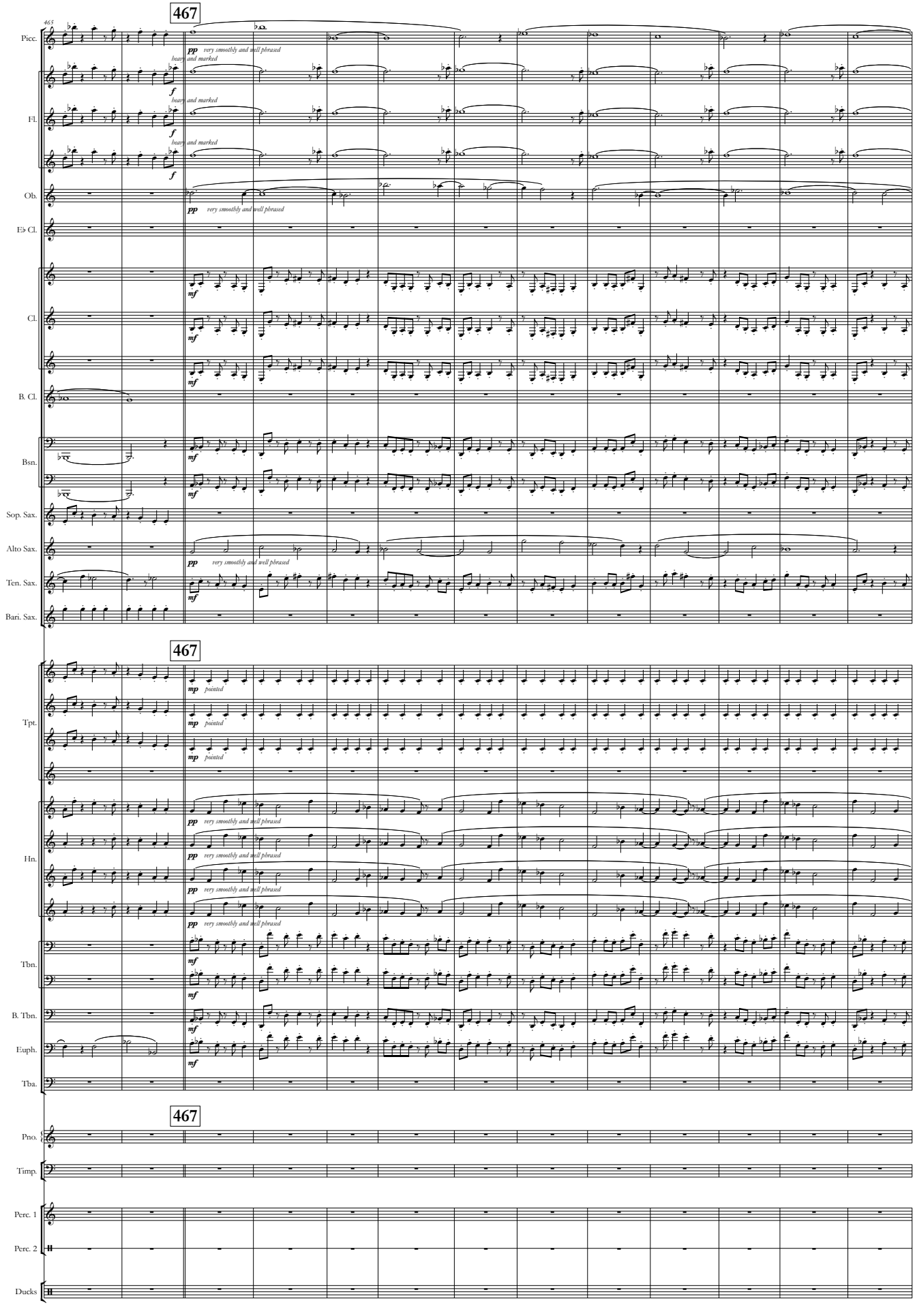

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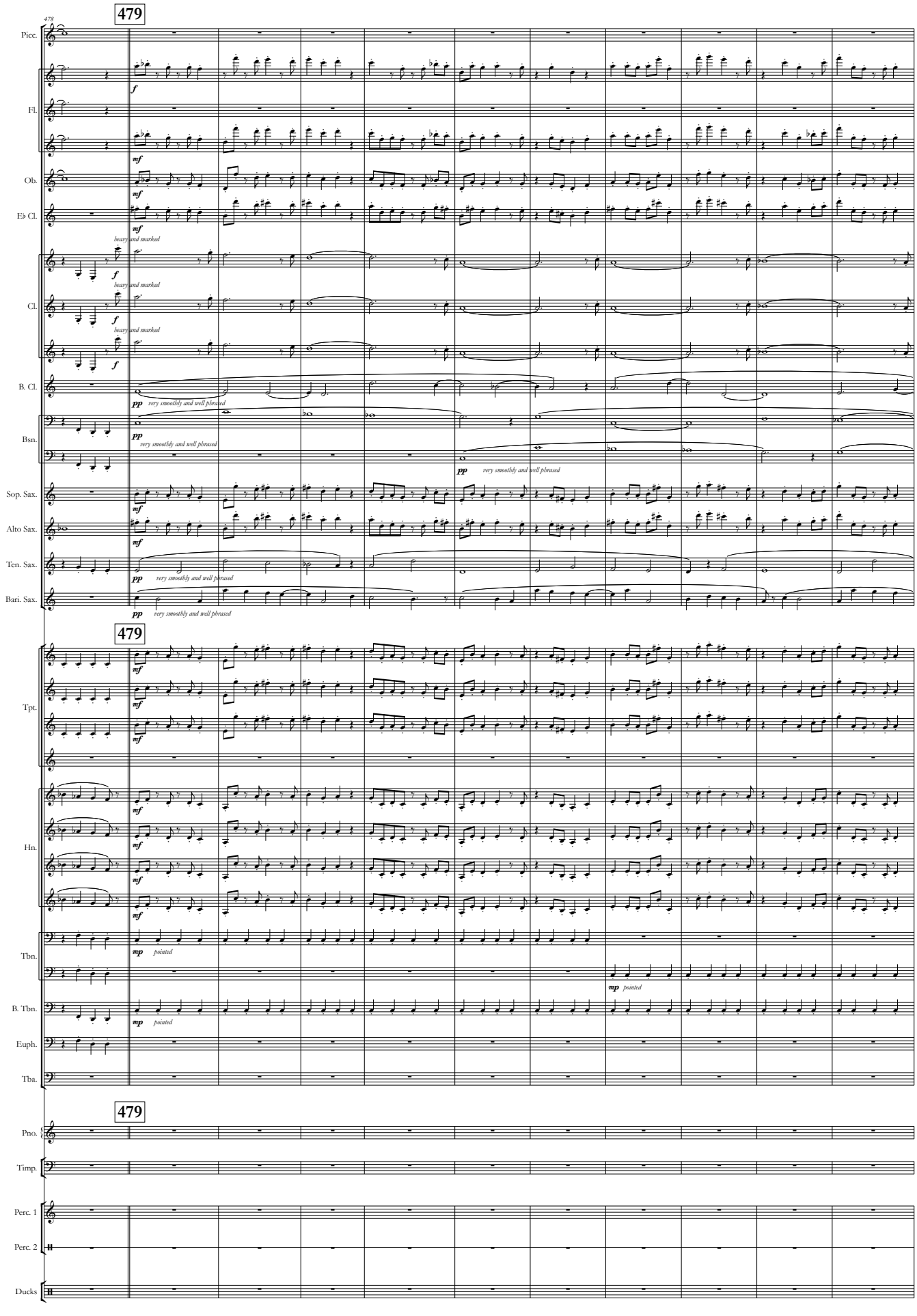

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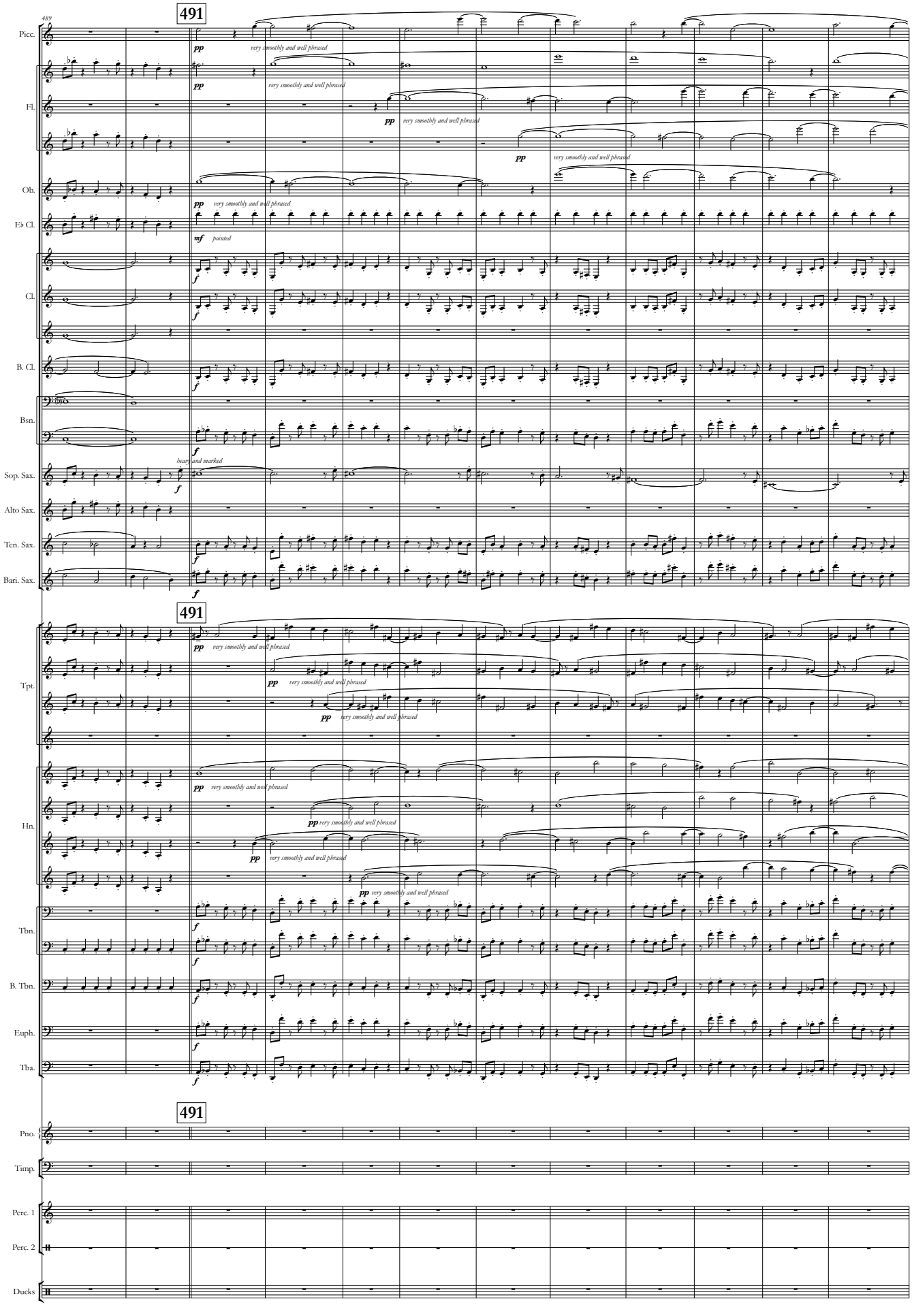

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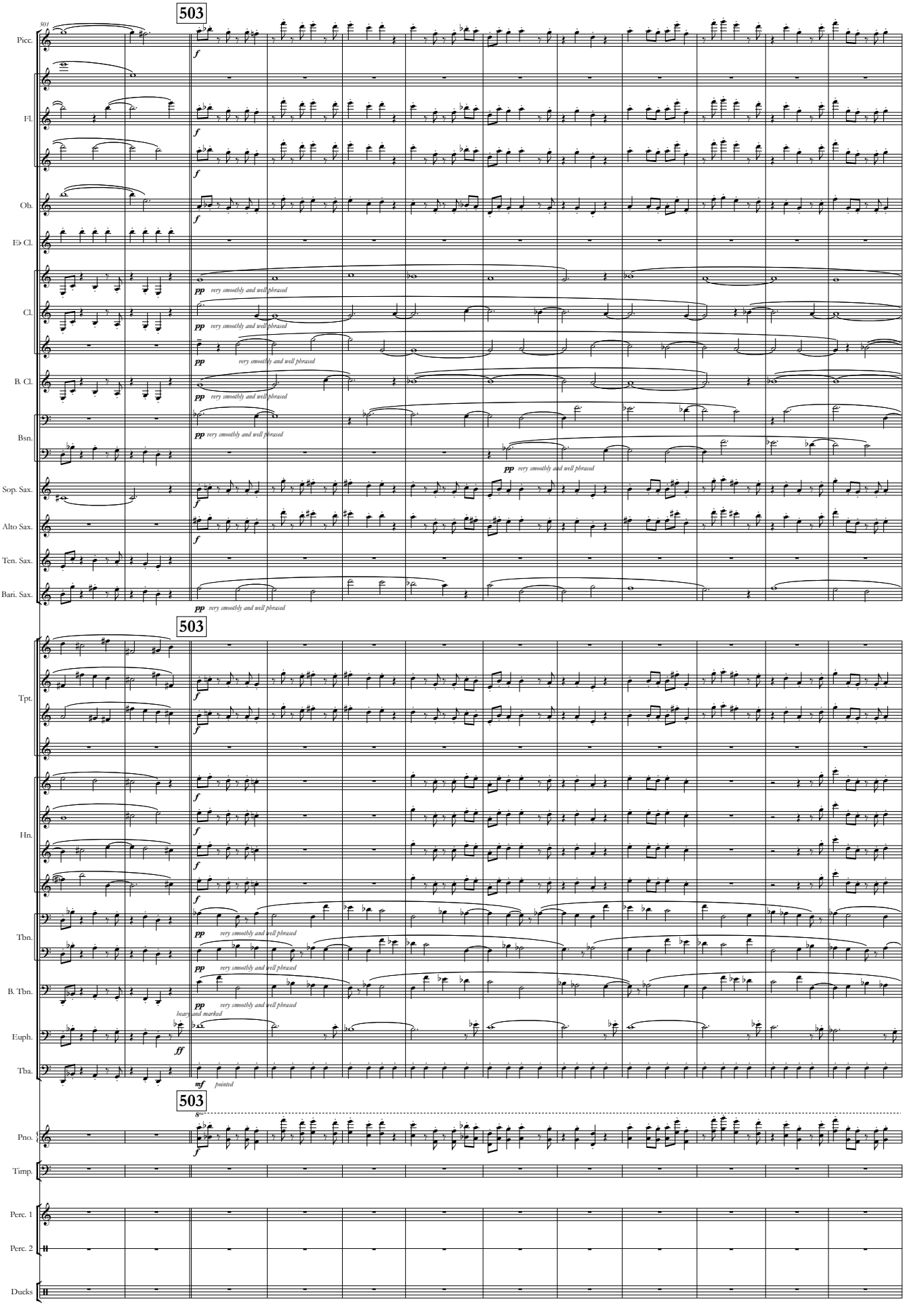

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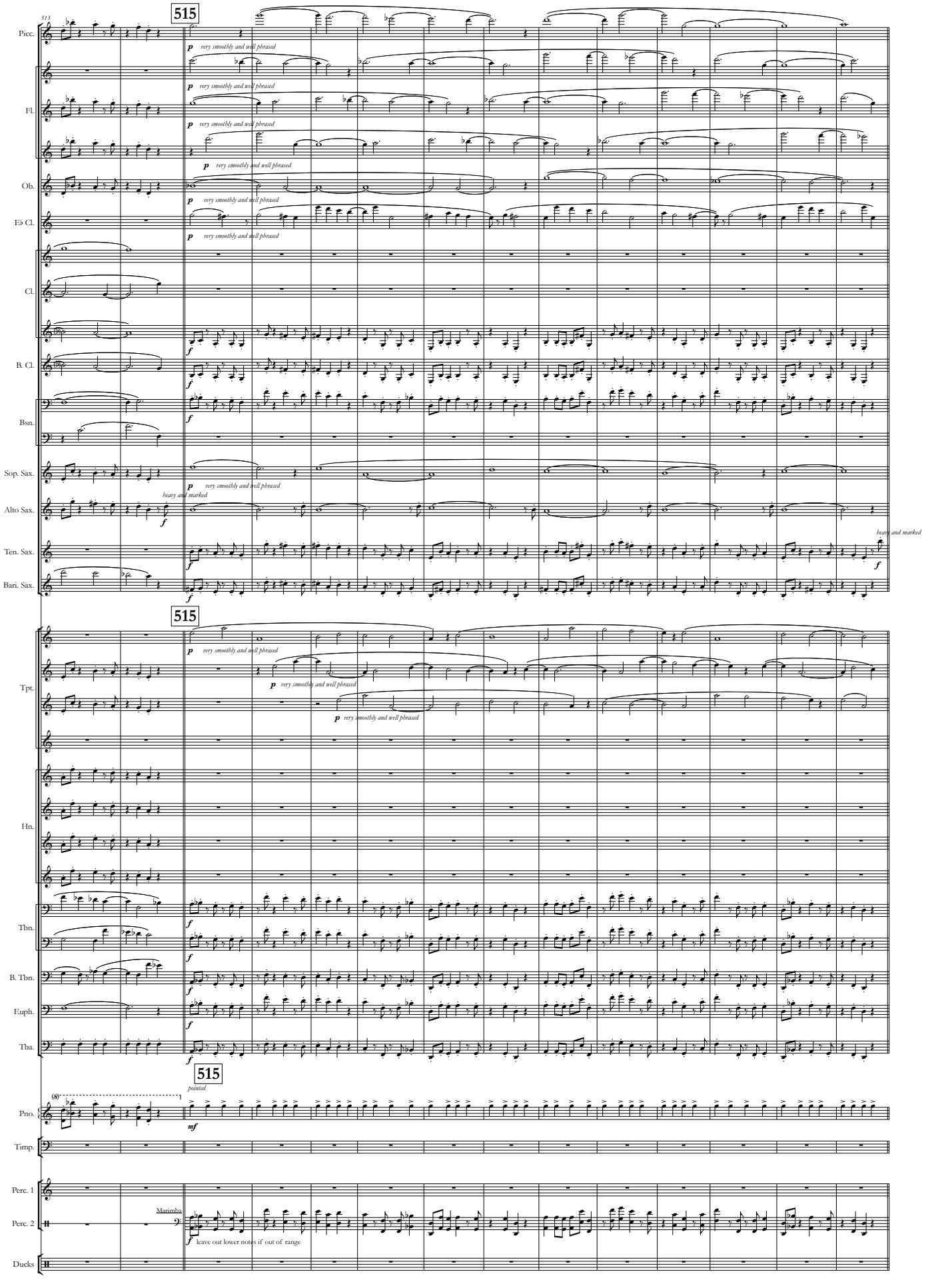

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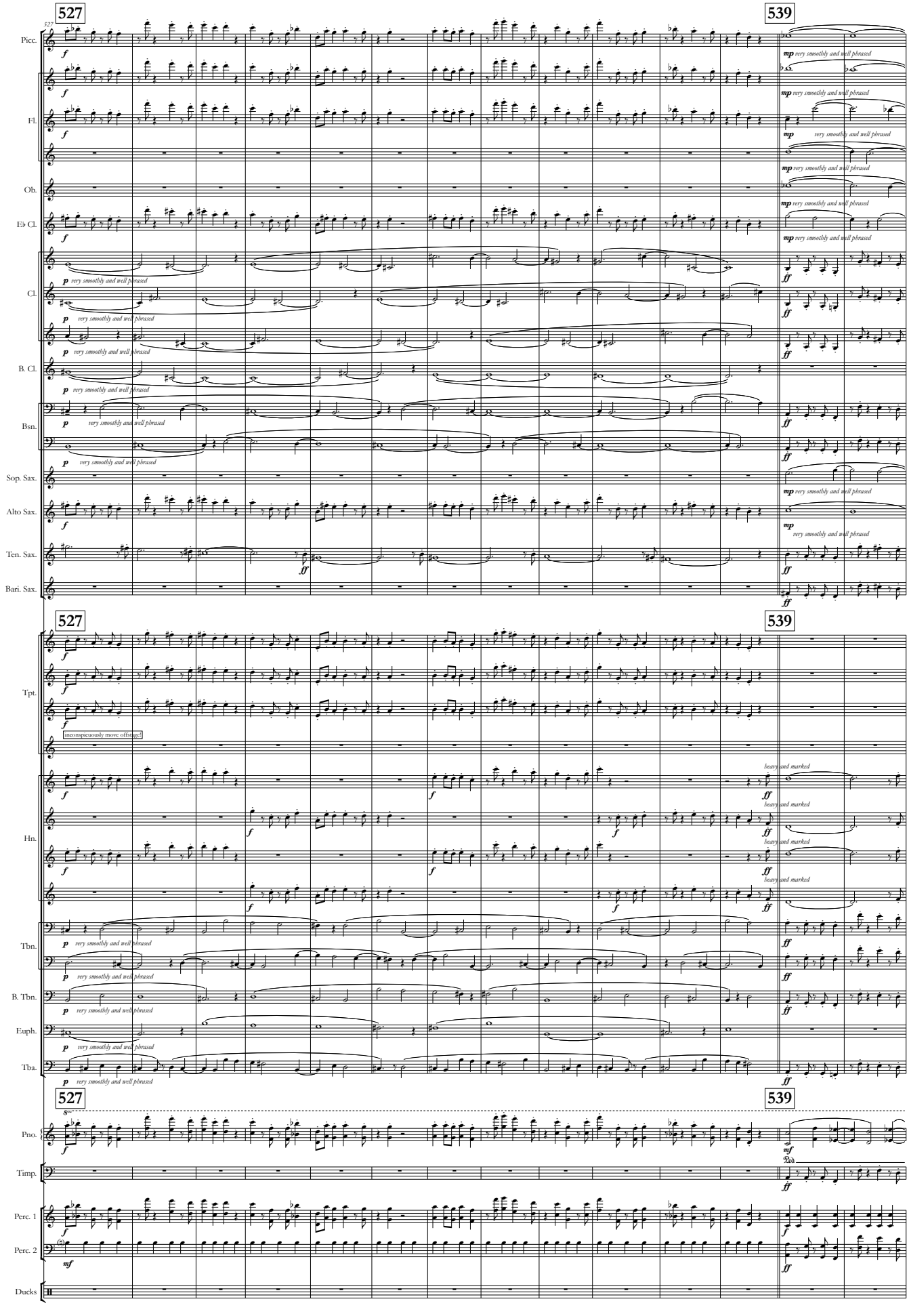

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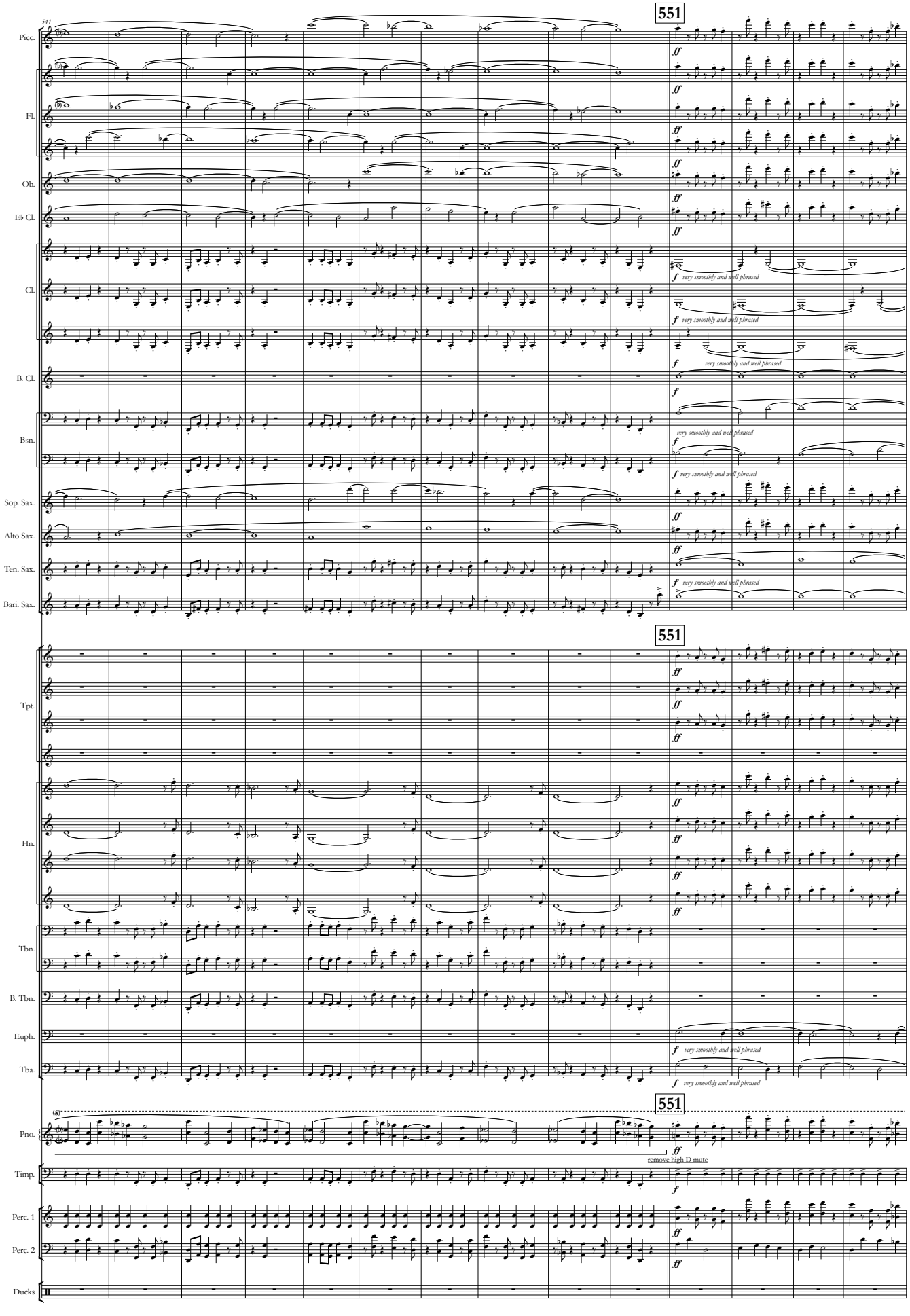

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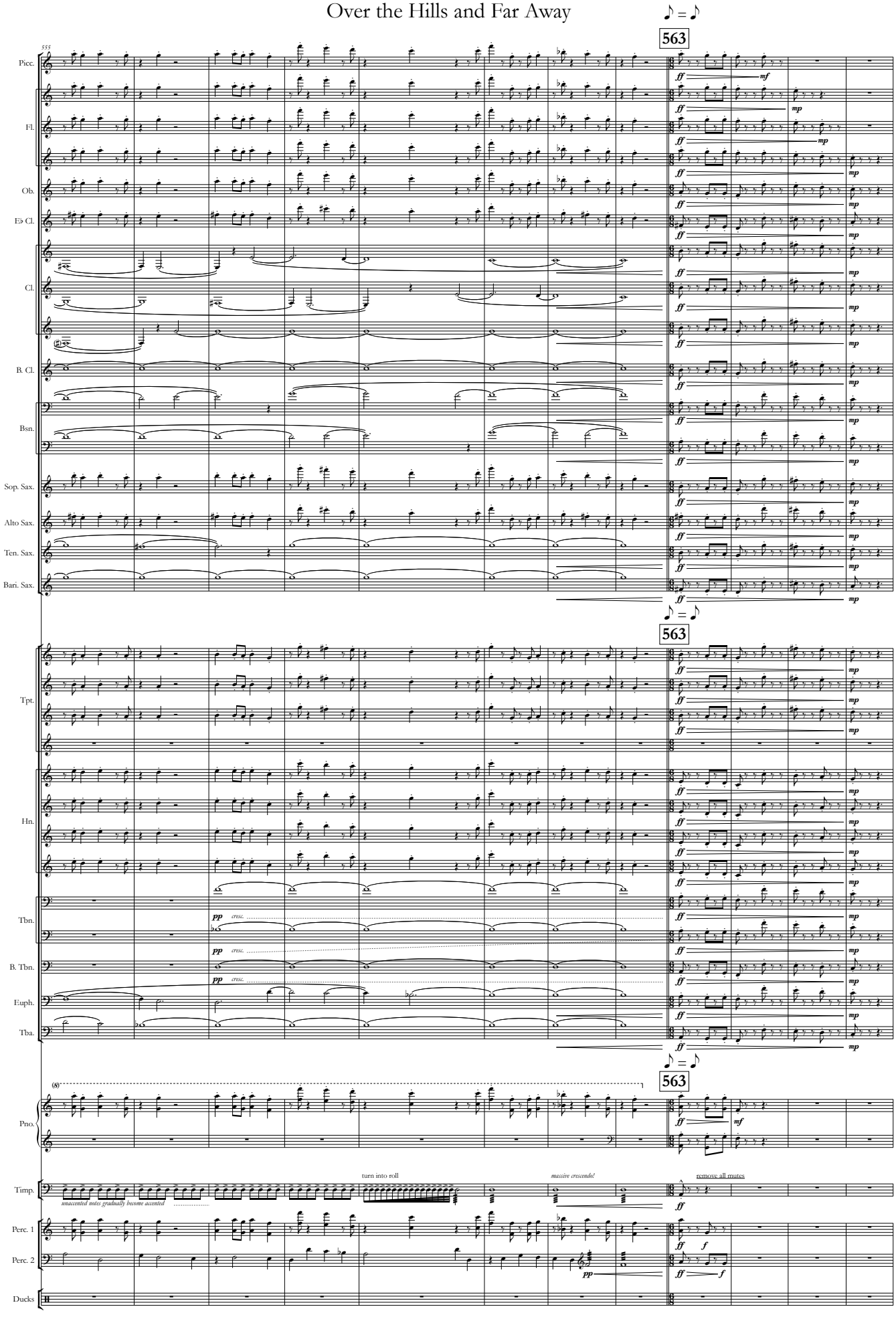

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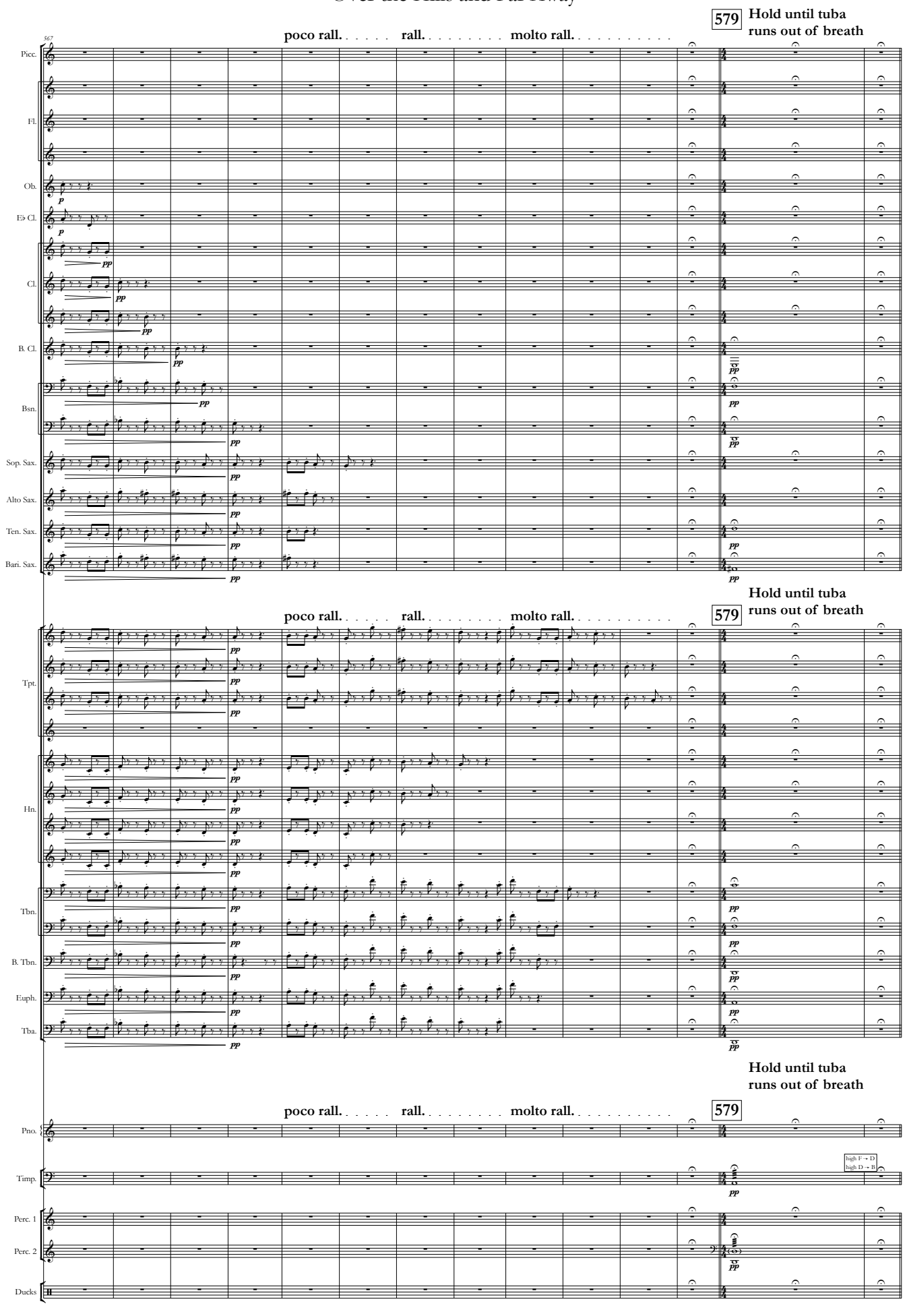

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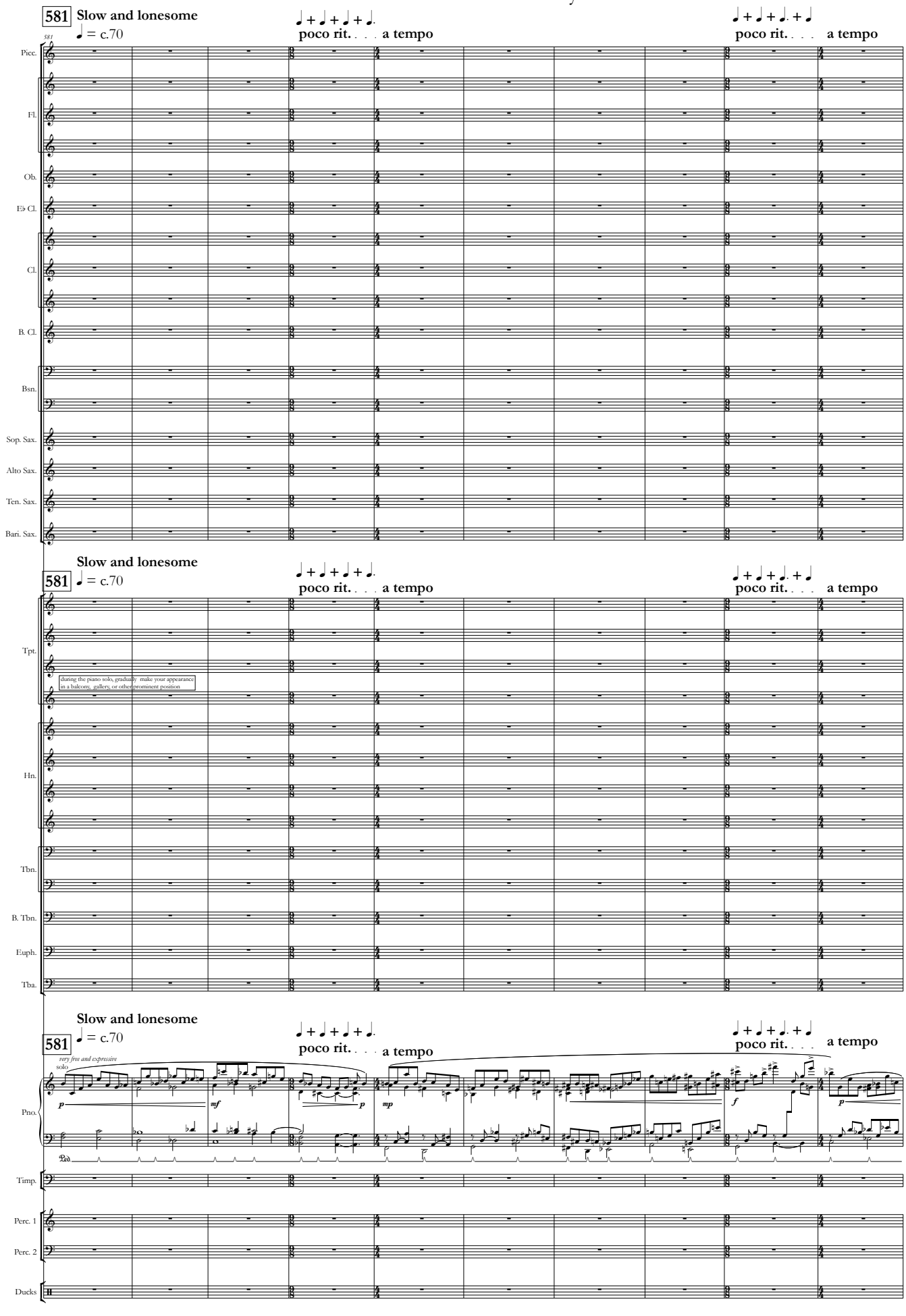

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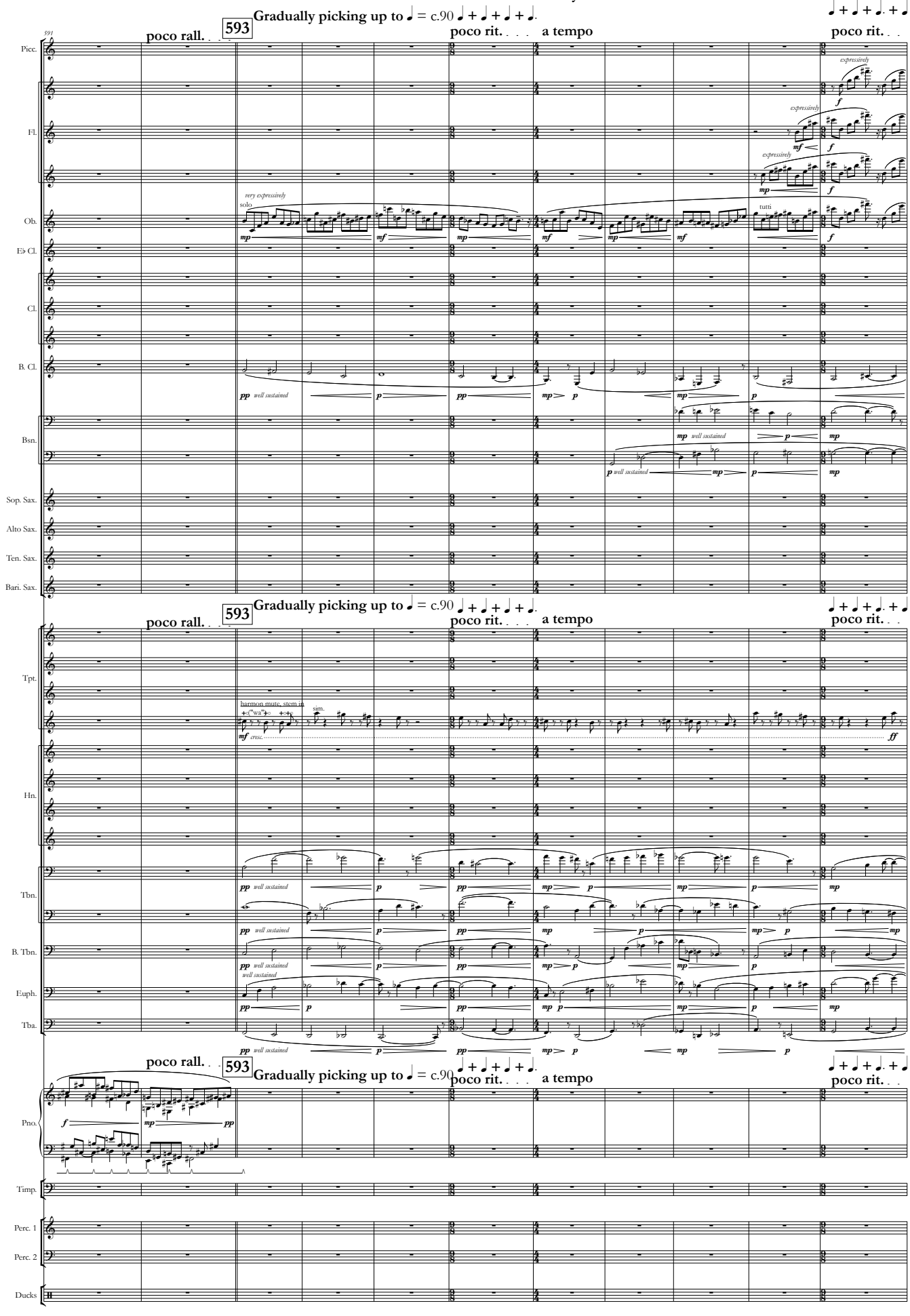

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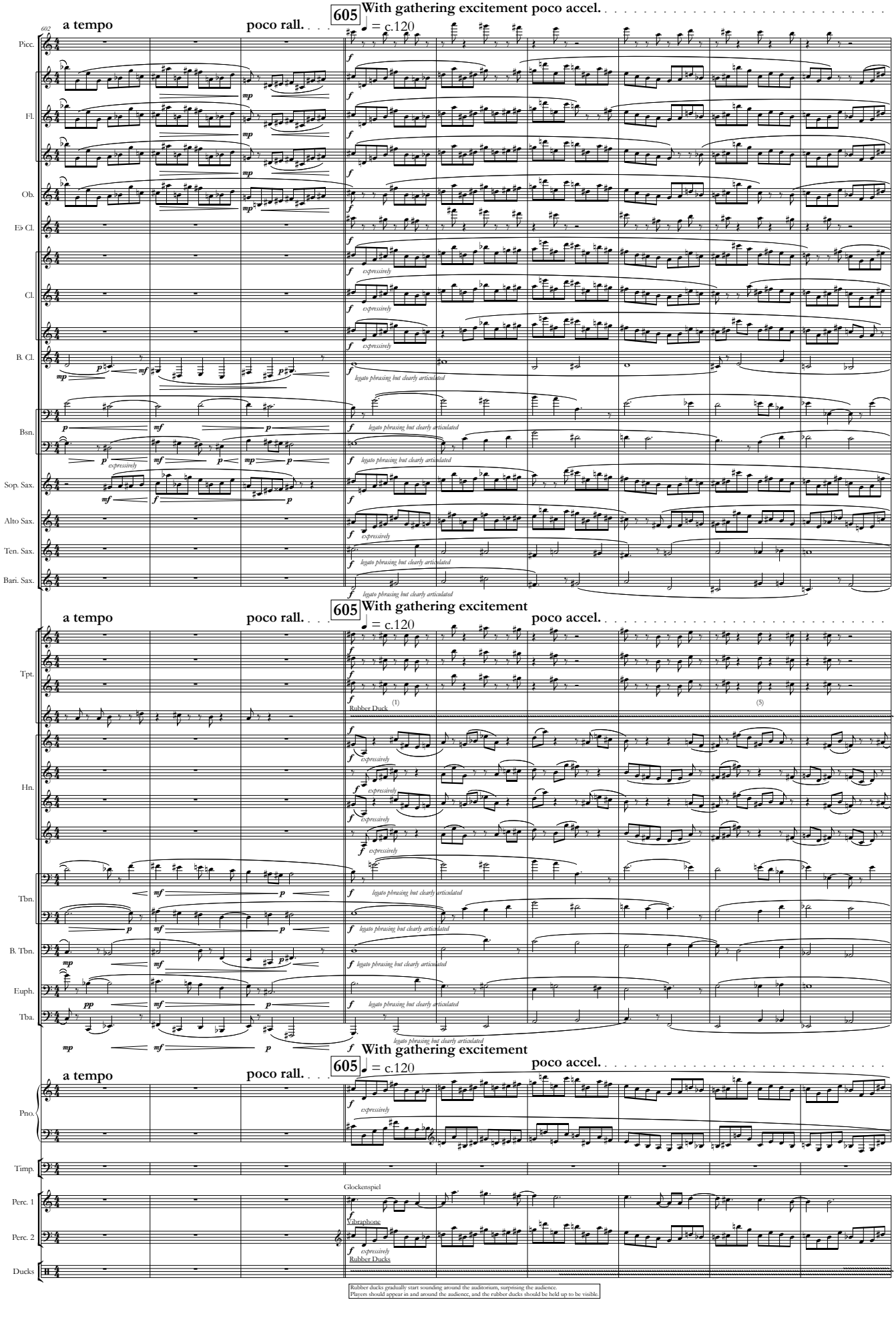

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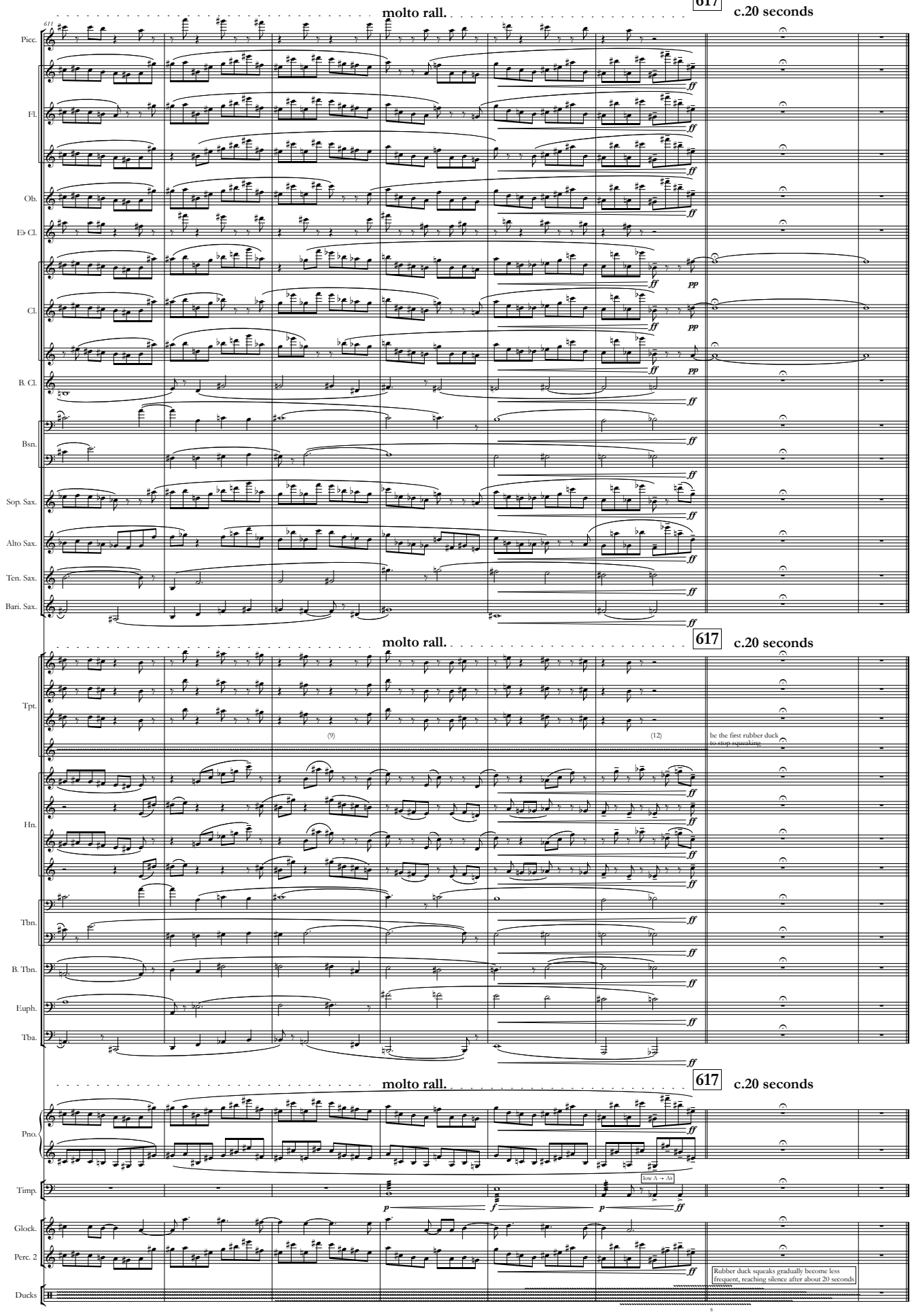


Cocoon

flute
clarinet in B-flat
violin
cello
vibraphone
piano

David John Lang

2014

Cocoon

Program Note:

This musical cocoon is woven out of a single 18-note thread. As it winds around and around, tiny imperfections creep in; and, as these are multiplied out, the simple spiral tightens into a tangled, many-layered web.

A cocoon is a retreat. You go into a cocoon when you've had enough. Another silkworm has stolen your leaf; you've fallen off the mulberry bush again; the rain won't stop. So, wearily and patiently and diligently, you spin a cocoon. You're giving up. Nobody and nothing can touch you any more. Let the wind blow the tree down if it wants to. You'll be dead to the world.

A cocoon is a coffin. It contains a chemical mush of what used to be a silkworm. Or the mush of broken dreams, hopes, promises, hearts. If anyone wants to know who you really are, it's safe and hidden, out of sight, forgotten. Locked up in a tiny case, hanging from a trembling leaf.

A cocoon is a surrender to God. Saint Teresa of Avila uses the metaphor of a silkworm to describe the state of a soul before God. Not proud and formal; not noisy and ecstatic; but resigned and broken, wanting to hide away, having given up. Dying to Self.

It is, of course, rather unfashionable these days to talk about surrendering yourself like this, even to God (if he's there). We are told to be strong and self-sufficient. Well, sometimes that doesn't work.

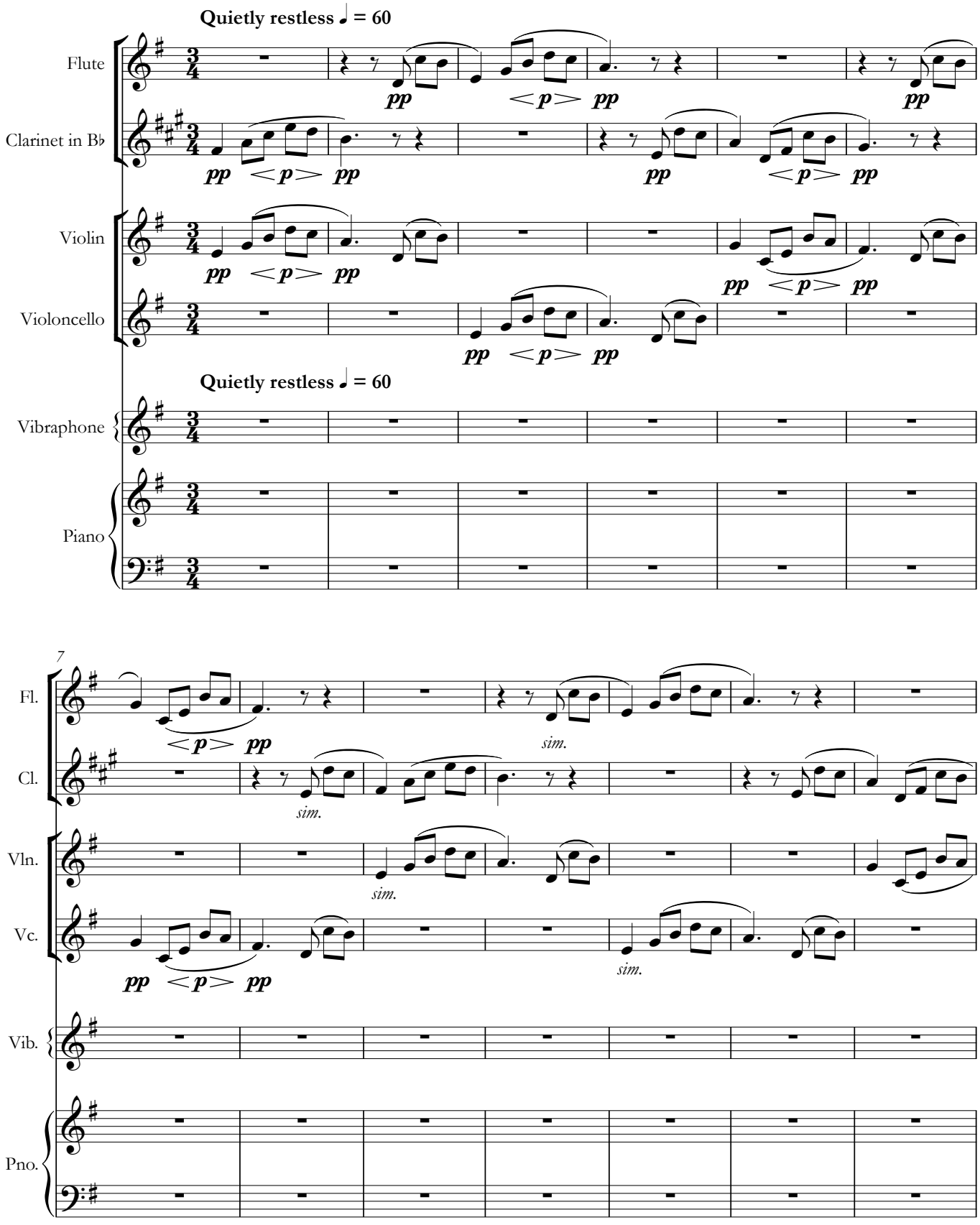
This piece of music curls up in a cocoon and stays there. Waiting.

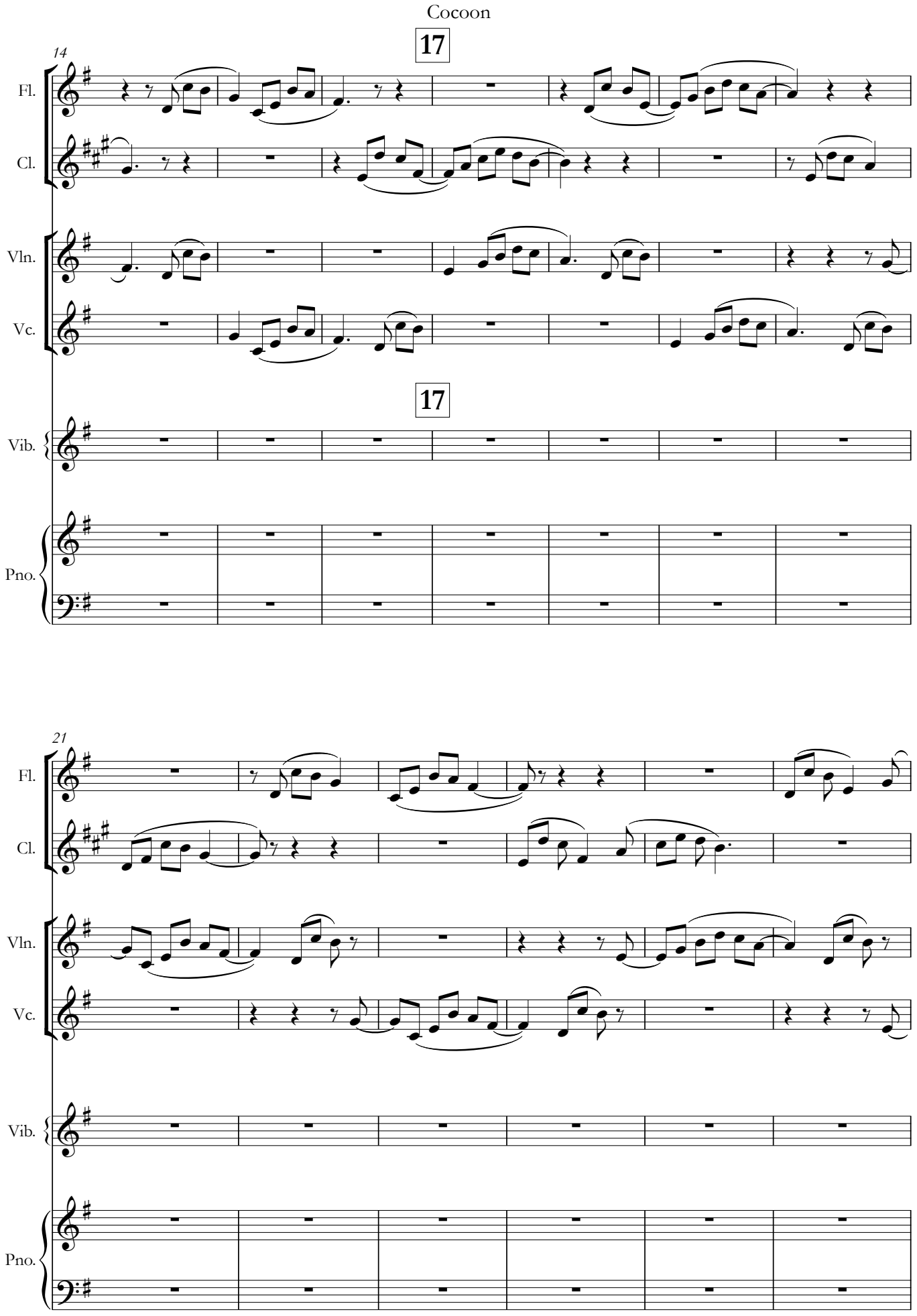
'For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God'
(Colossians 3:3)

[transposed score]

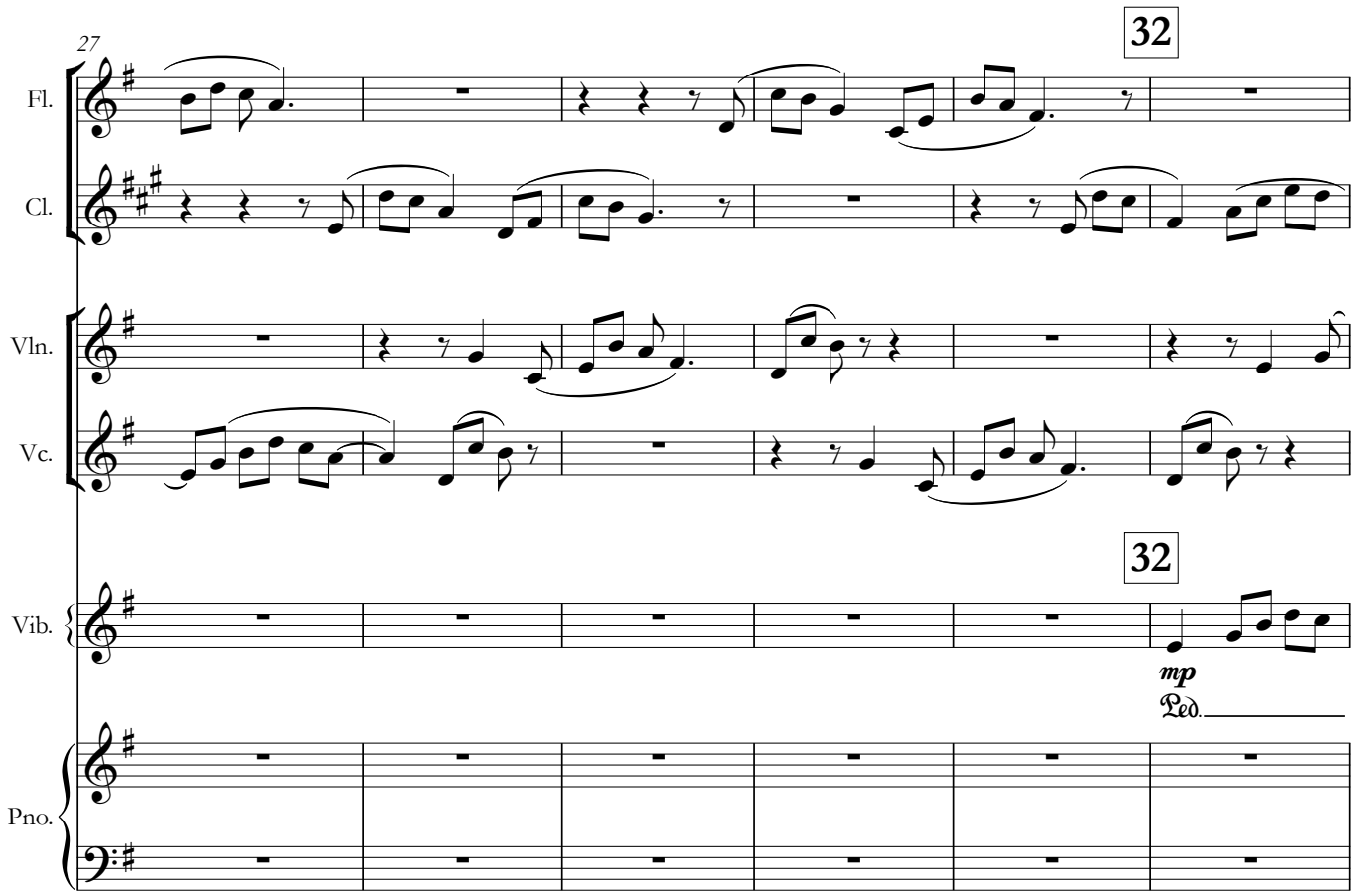
Cocoon

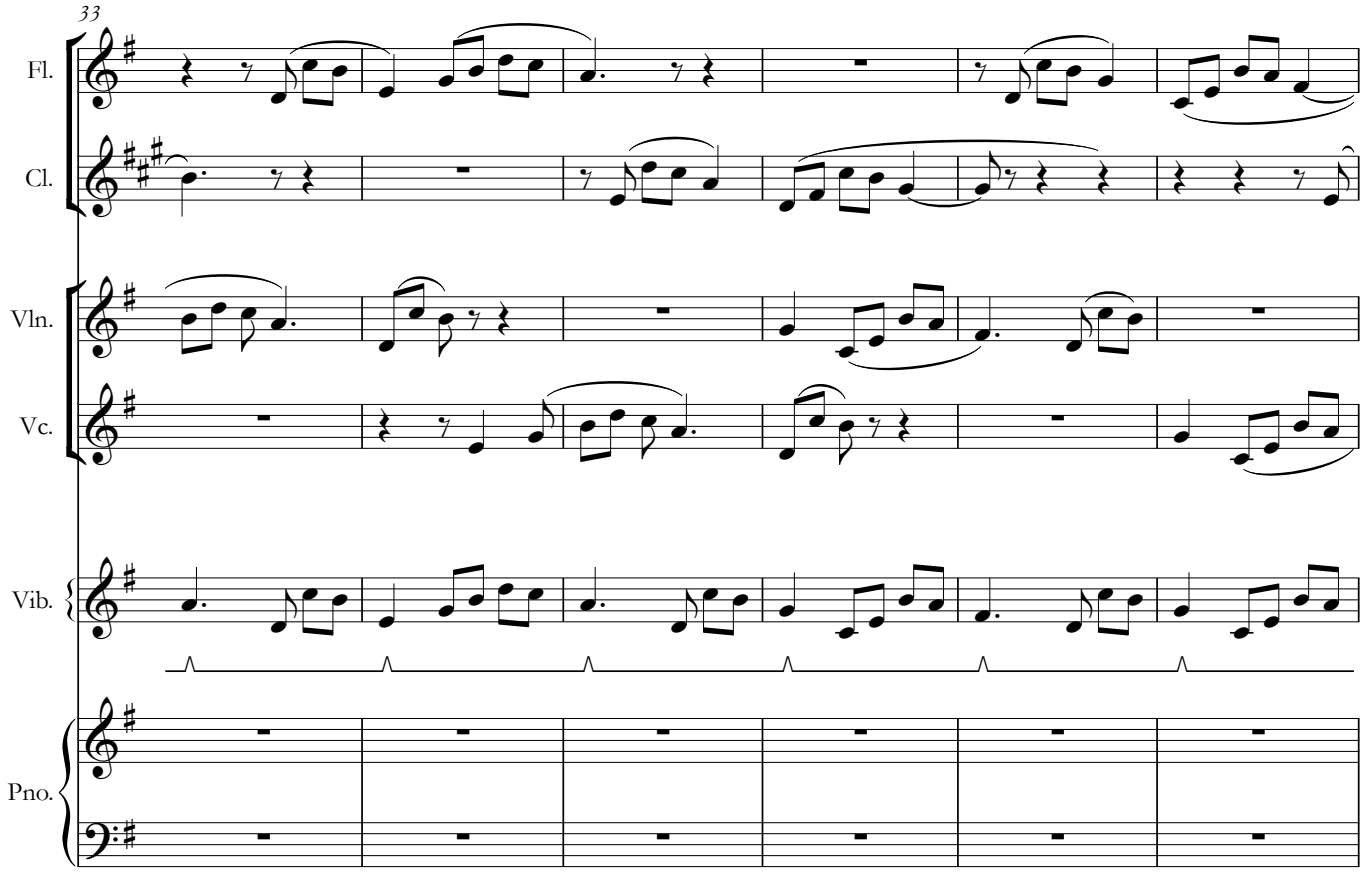
David John Lang

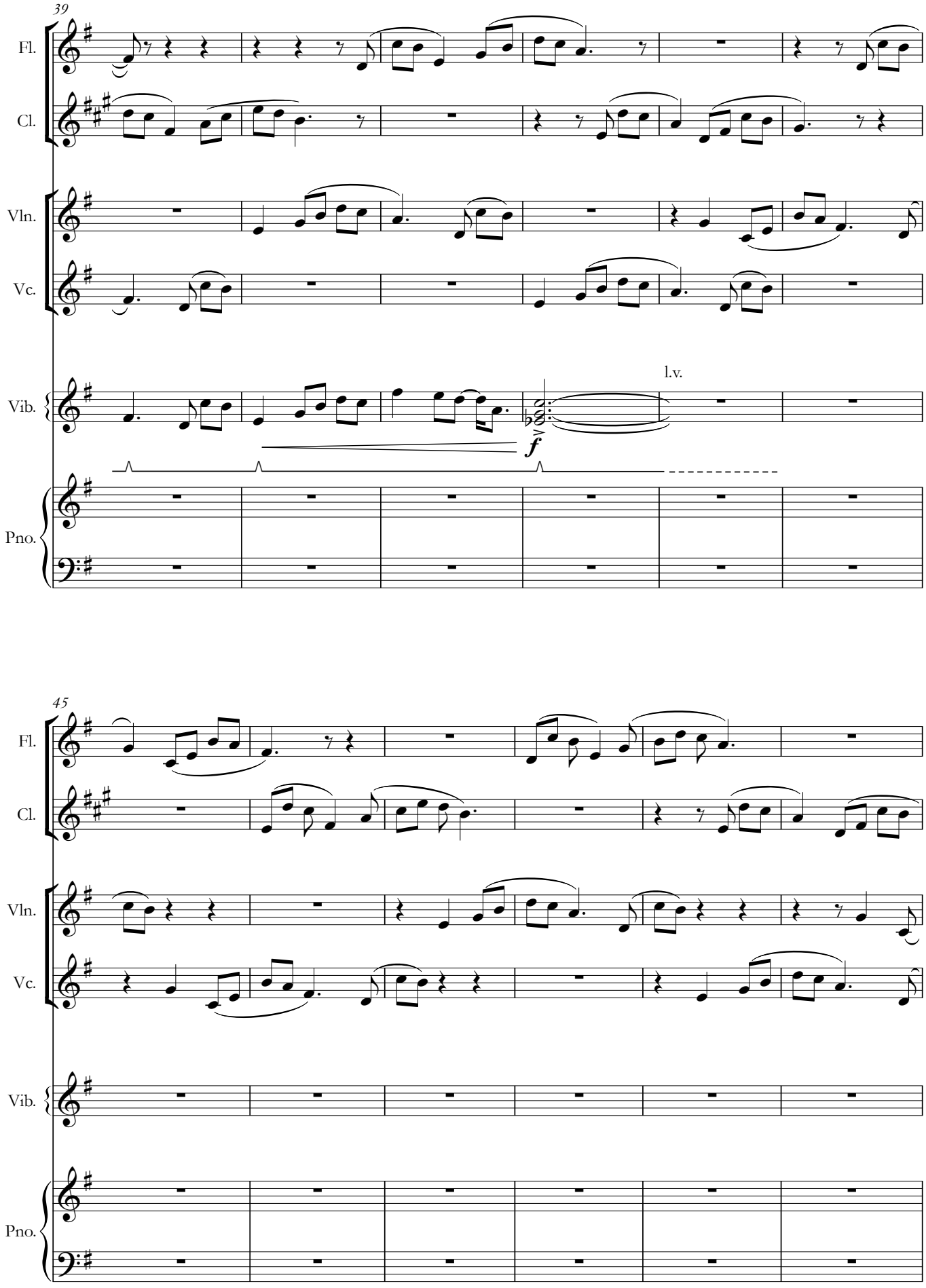


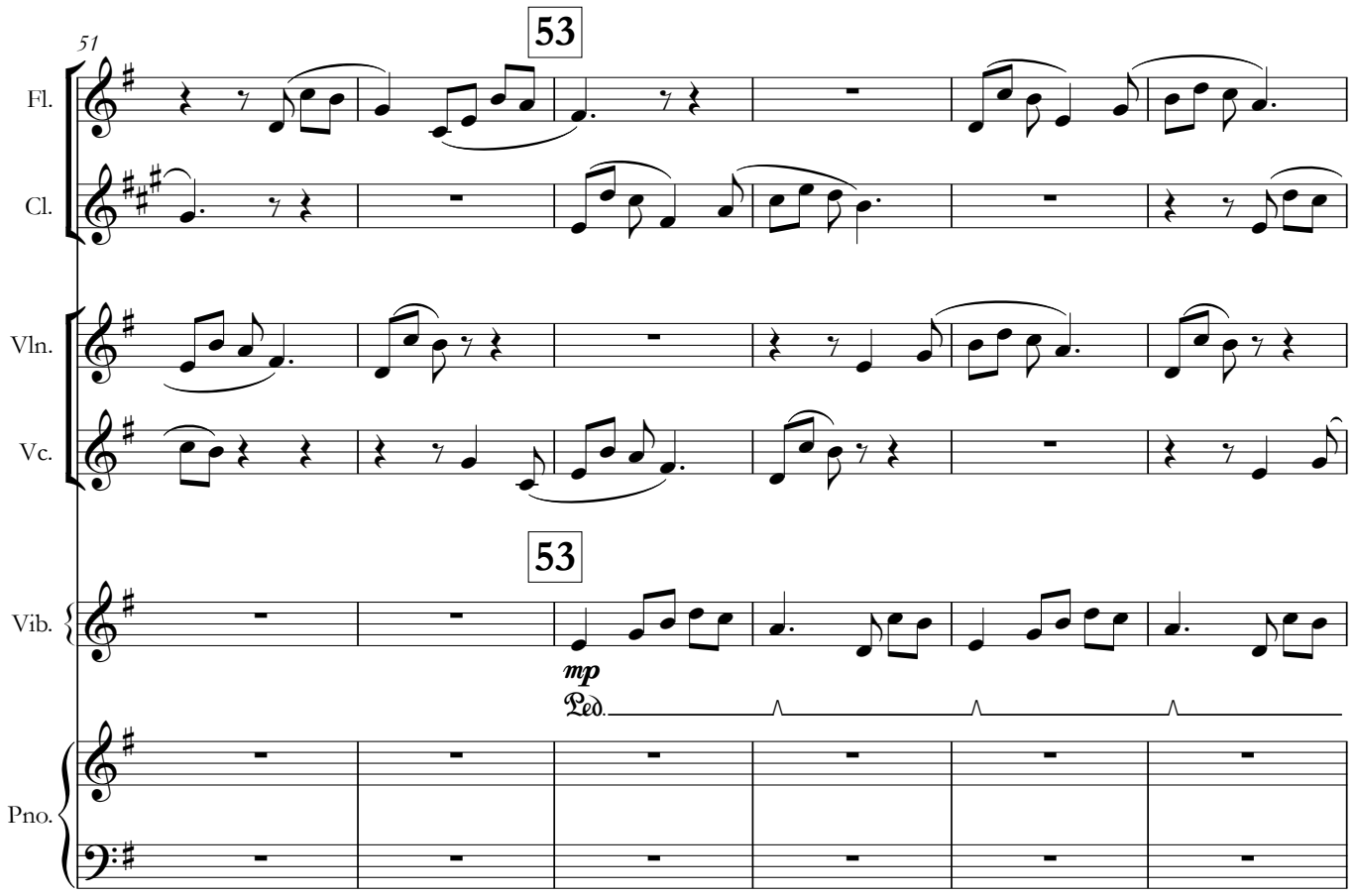

Cocoon
17
14
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
17
Vib.
Pno.
21
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.

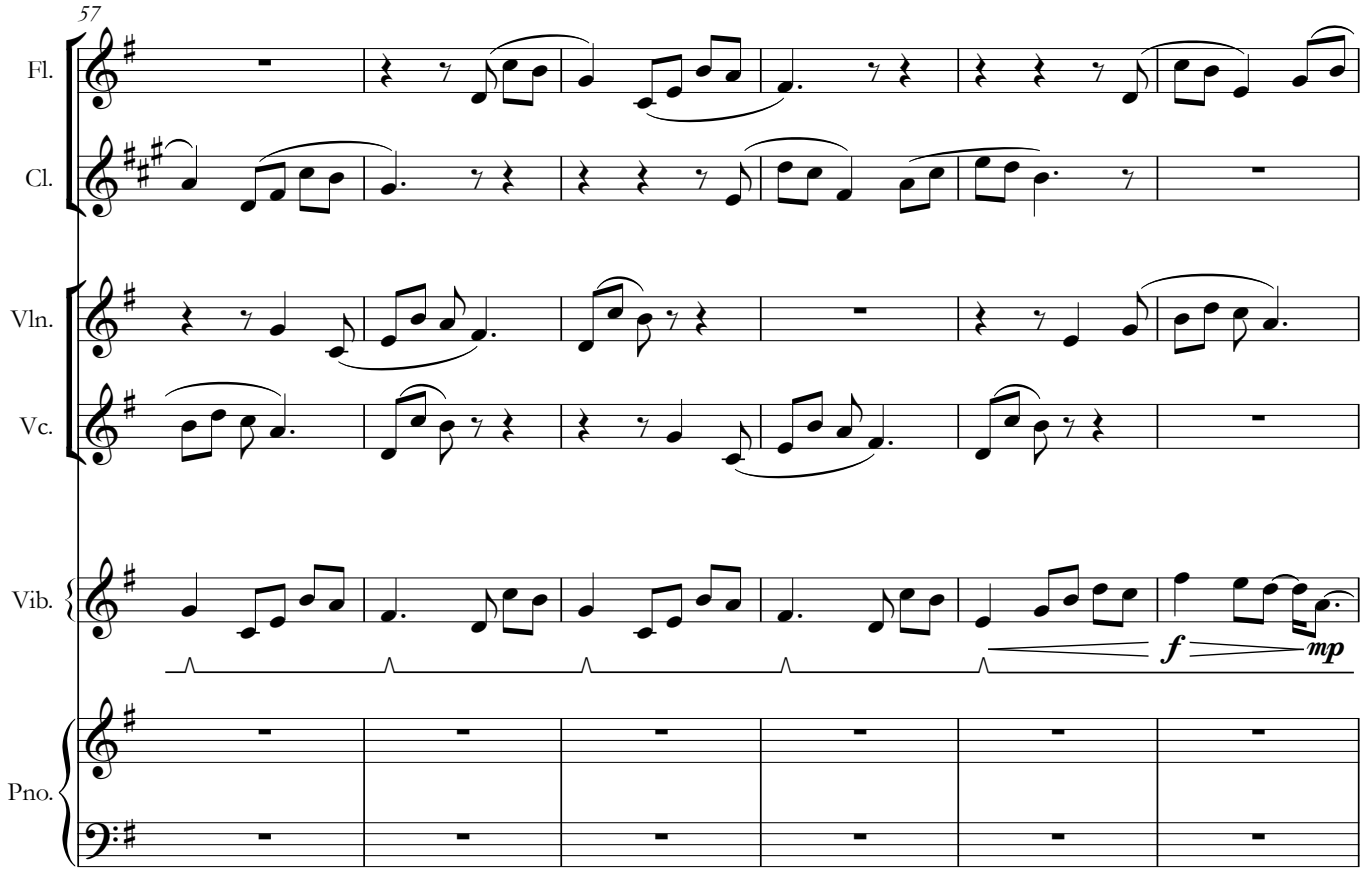
Cocoon

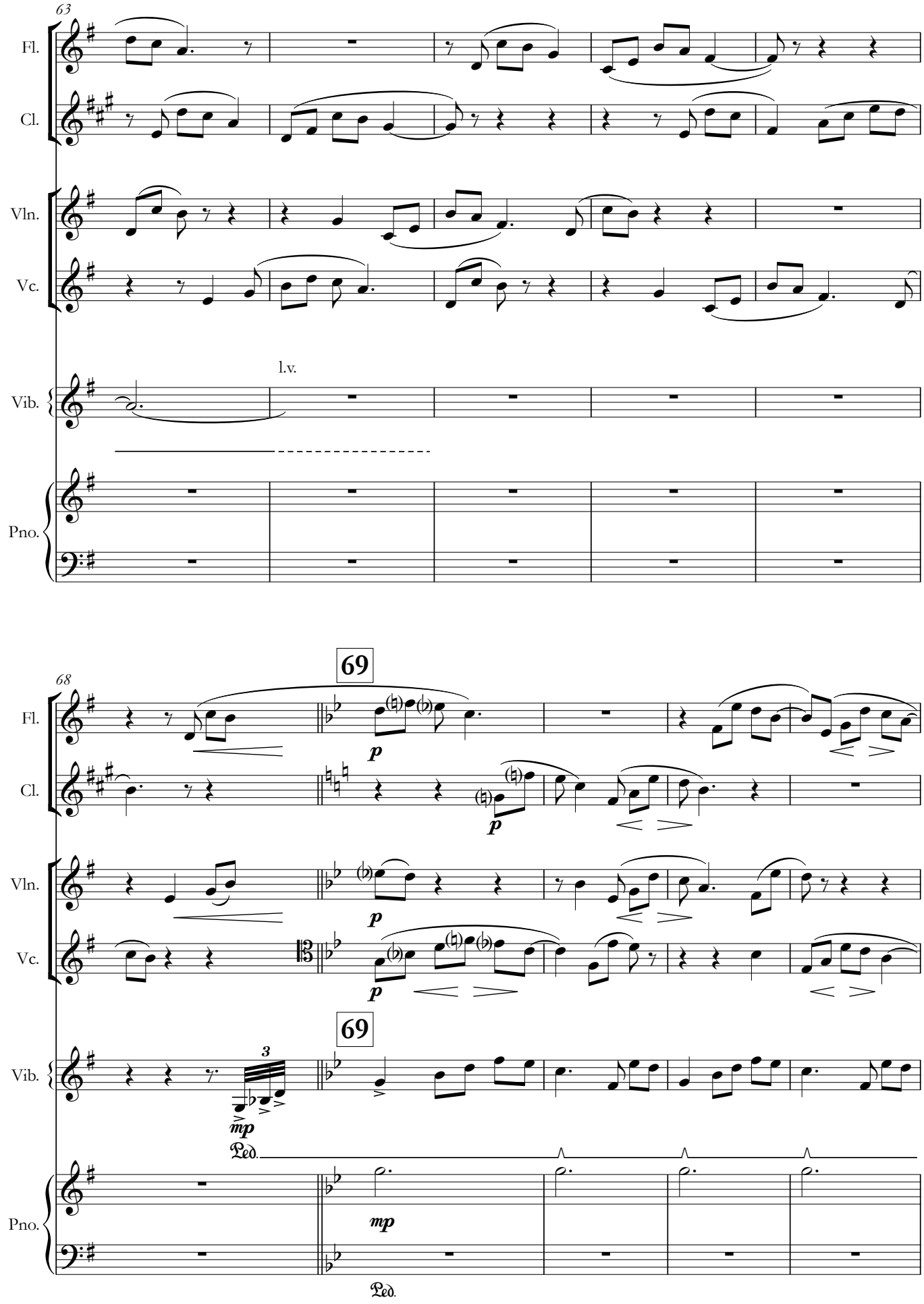




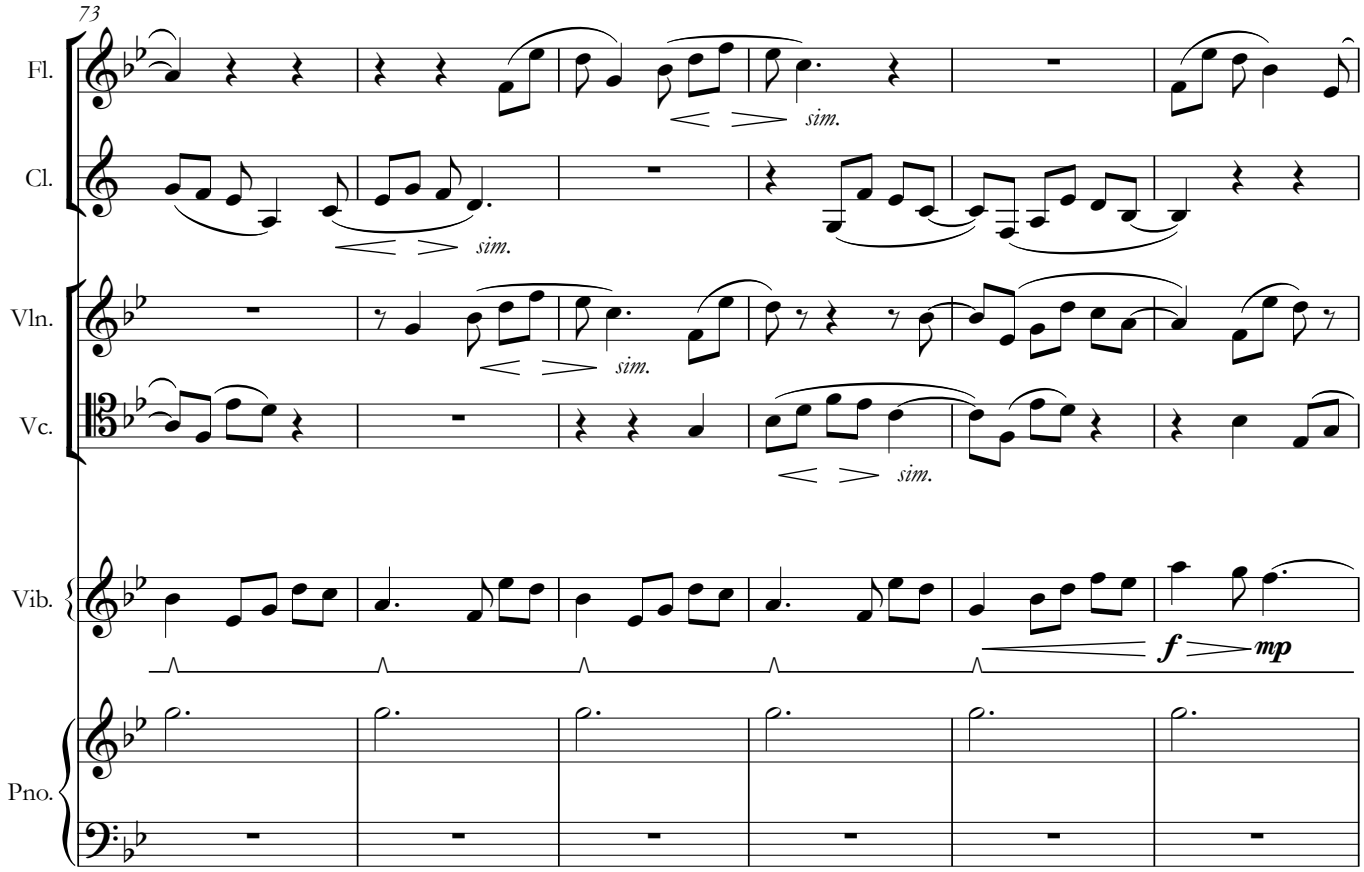

39
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
l.v.
f
45
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.

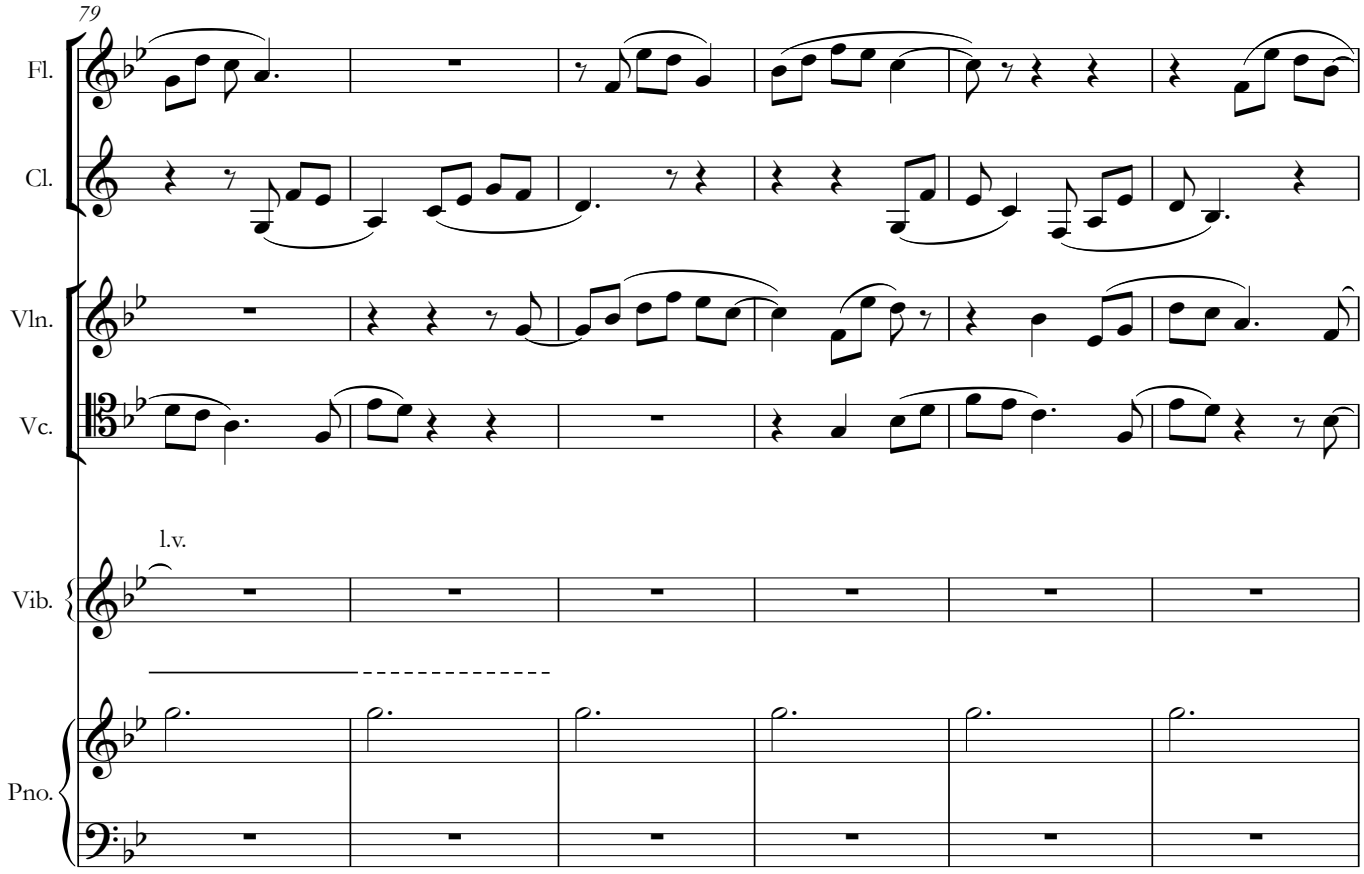

51
53
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
53
Vib.
mp
Ped.
Pno.

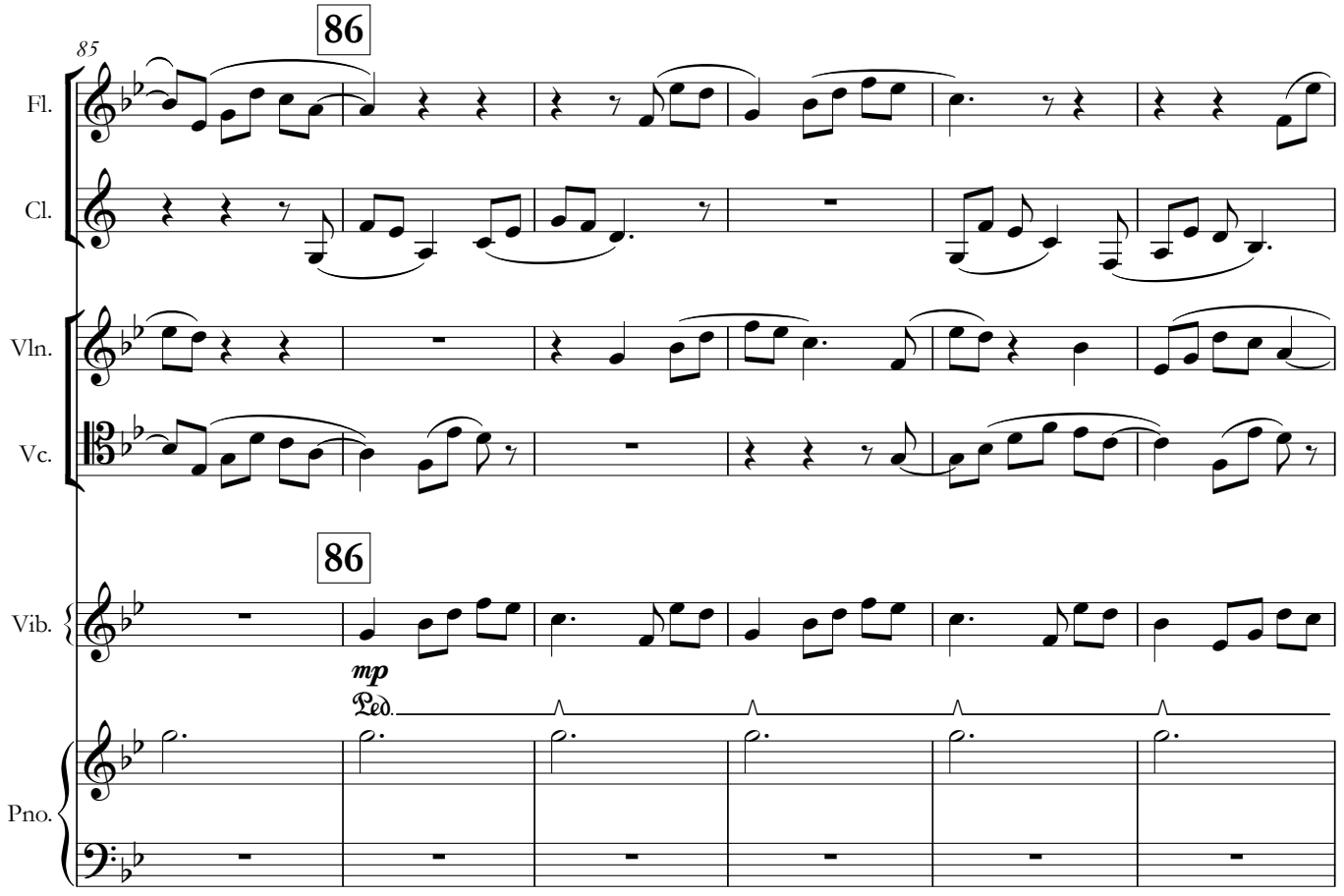

57
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
f
mp
Pno.

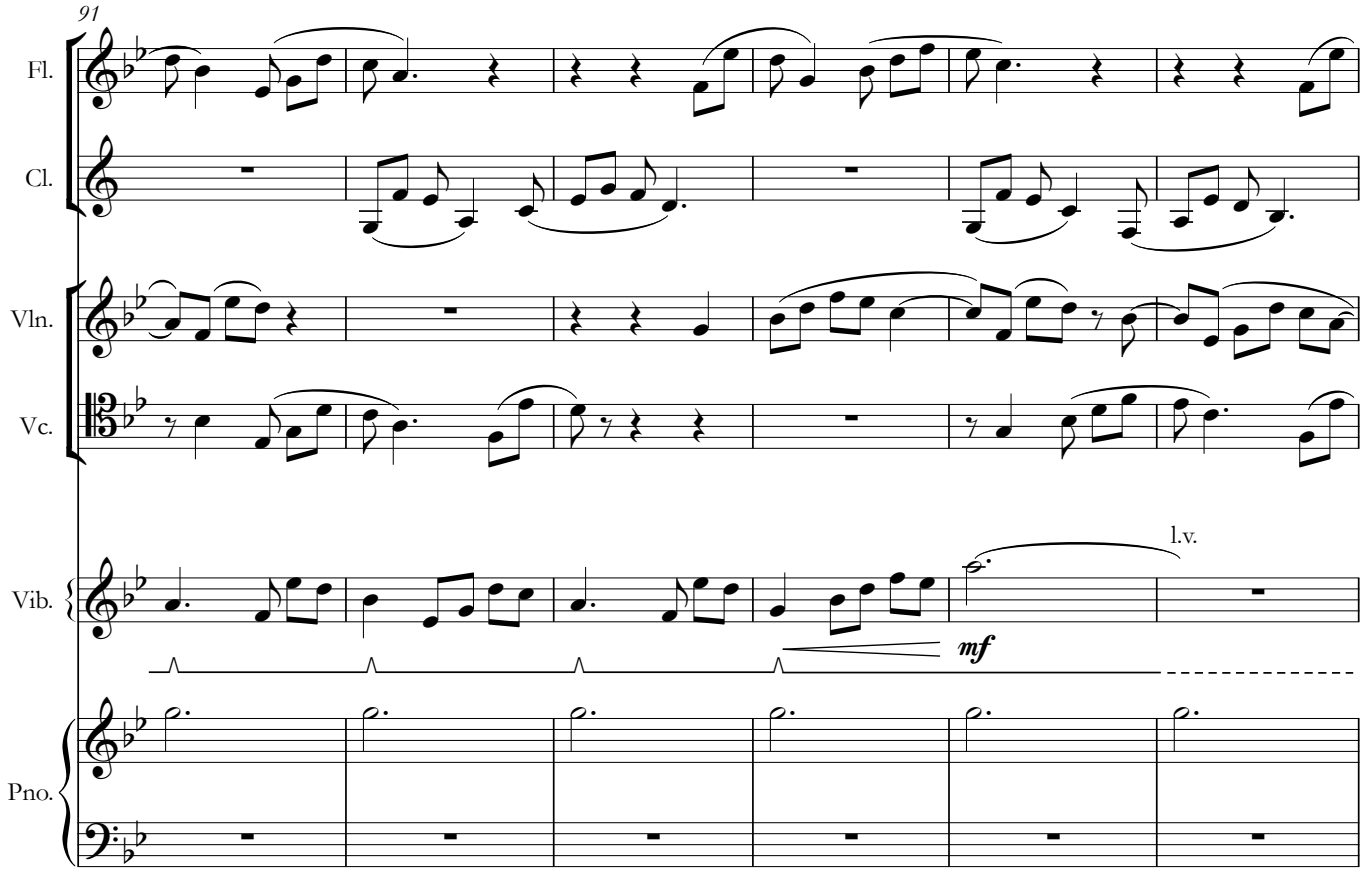

63
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.
68
69
p
p
p
69
3
mp
Ped.
mp
Ped.

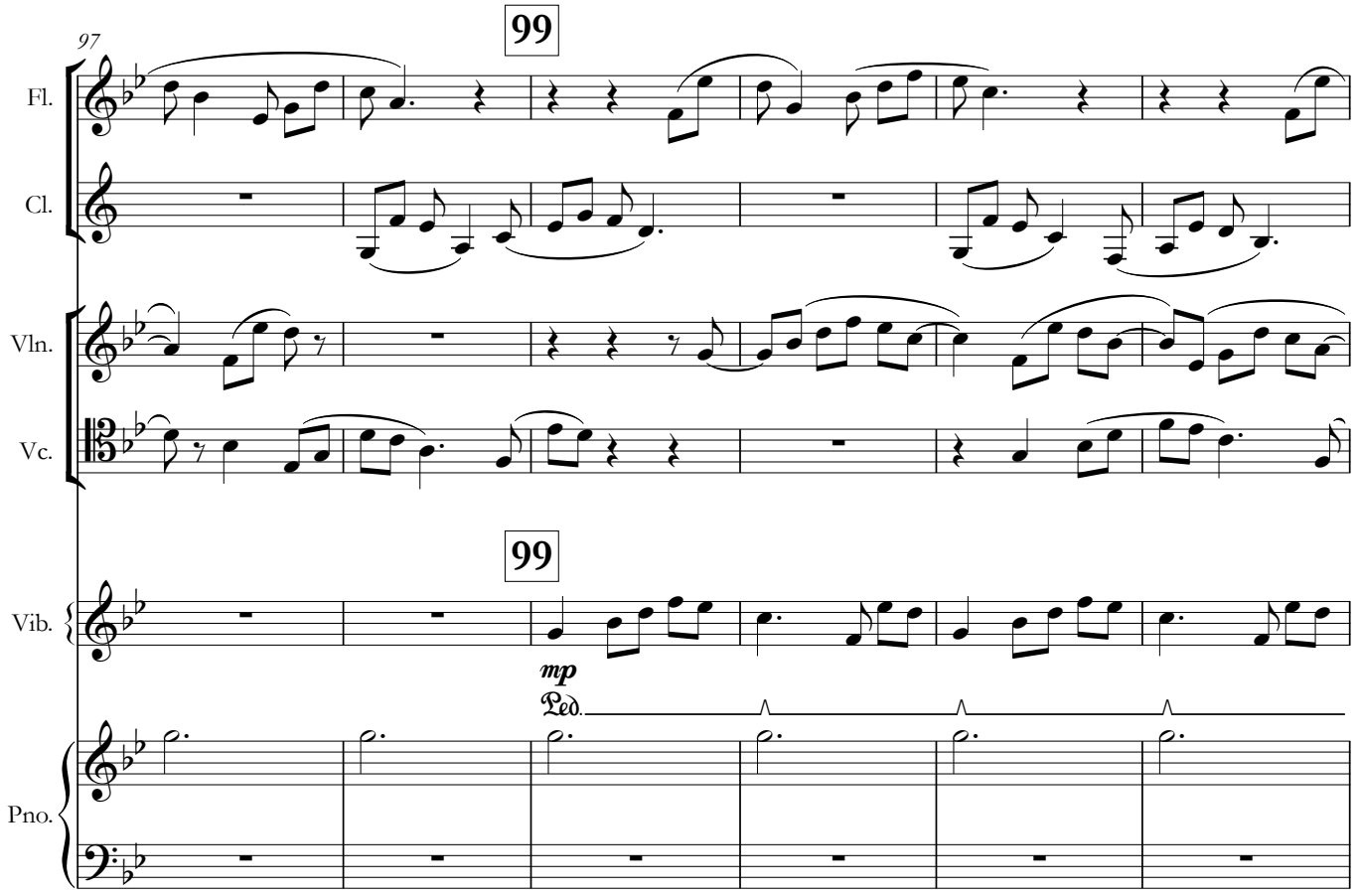
Cocoon

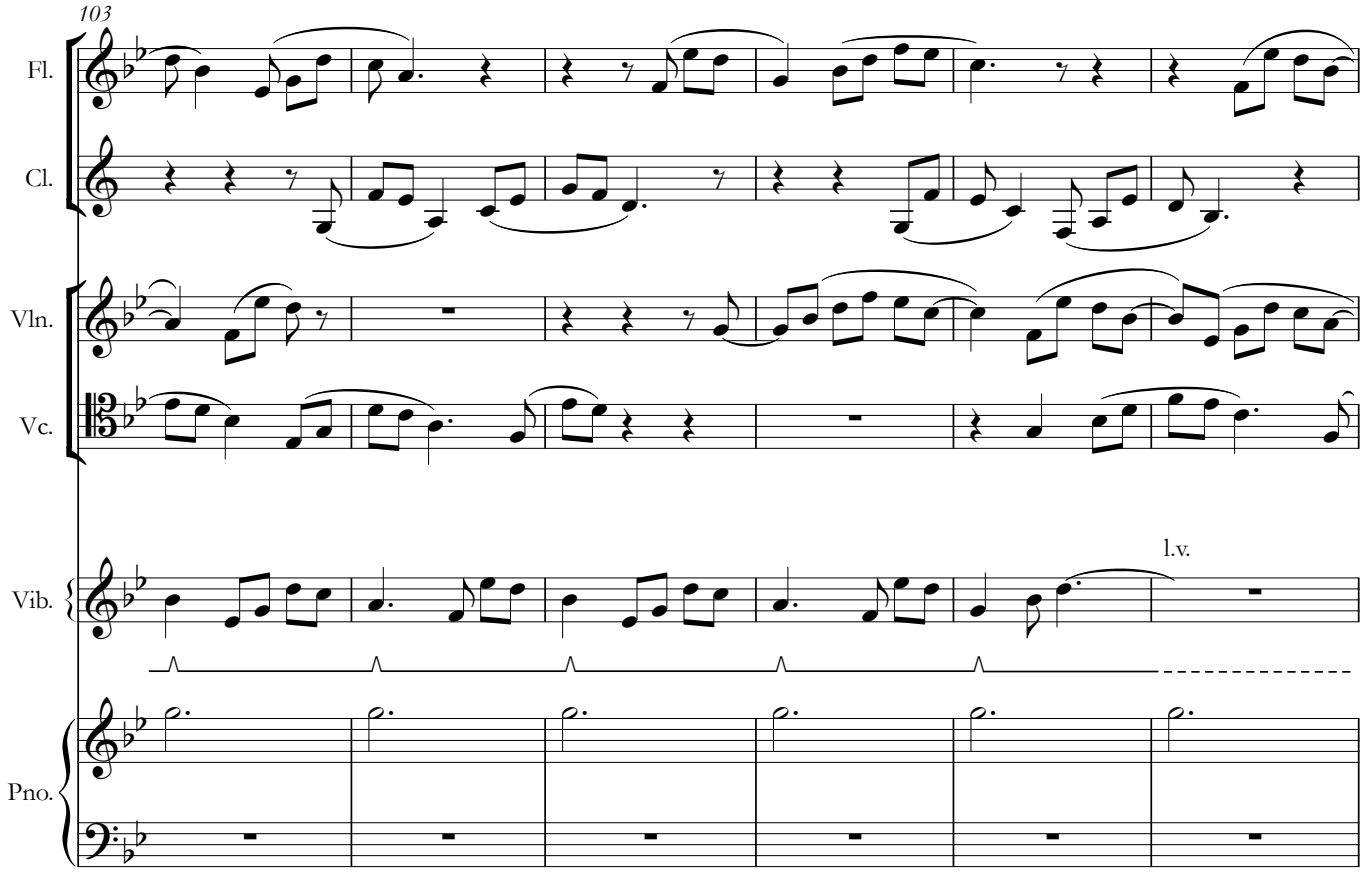

73
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
sim.
sim.
sim.
sim.
f
mp

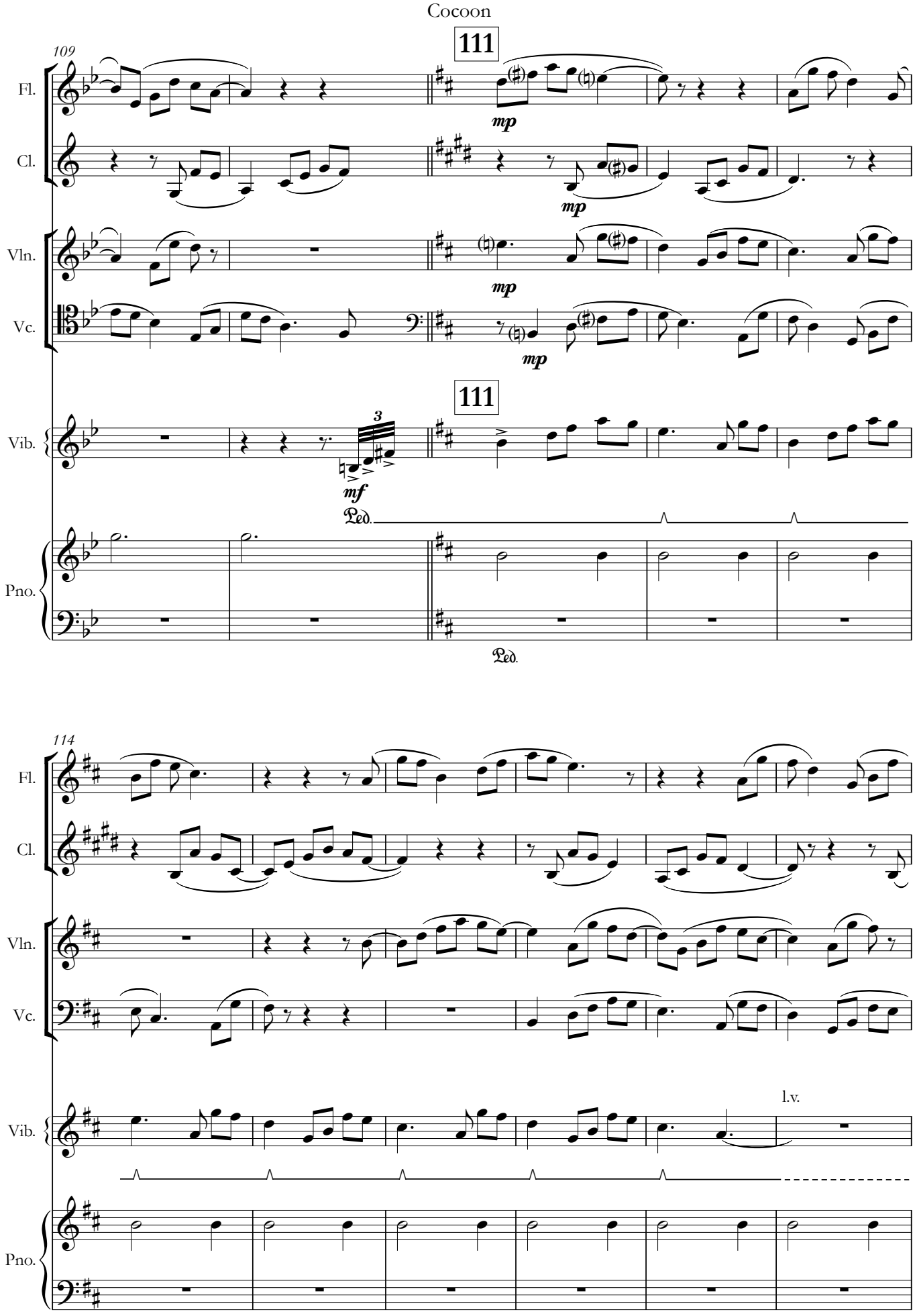

79
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.


85
86
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
86
Vib.
mp
Ped.
Pno.

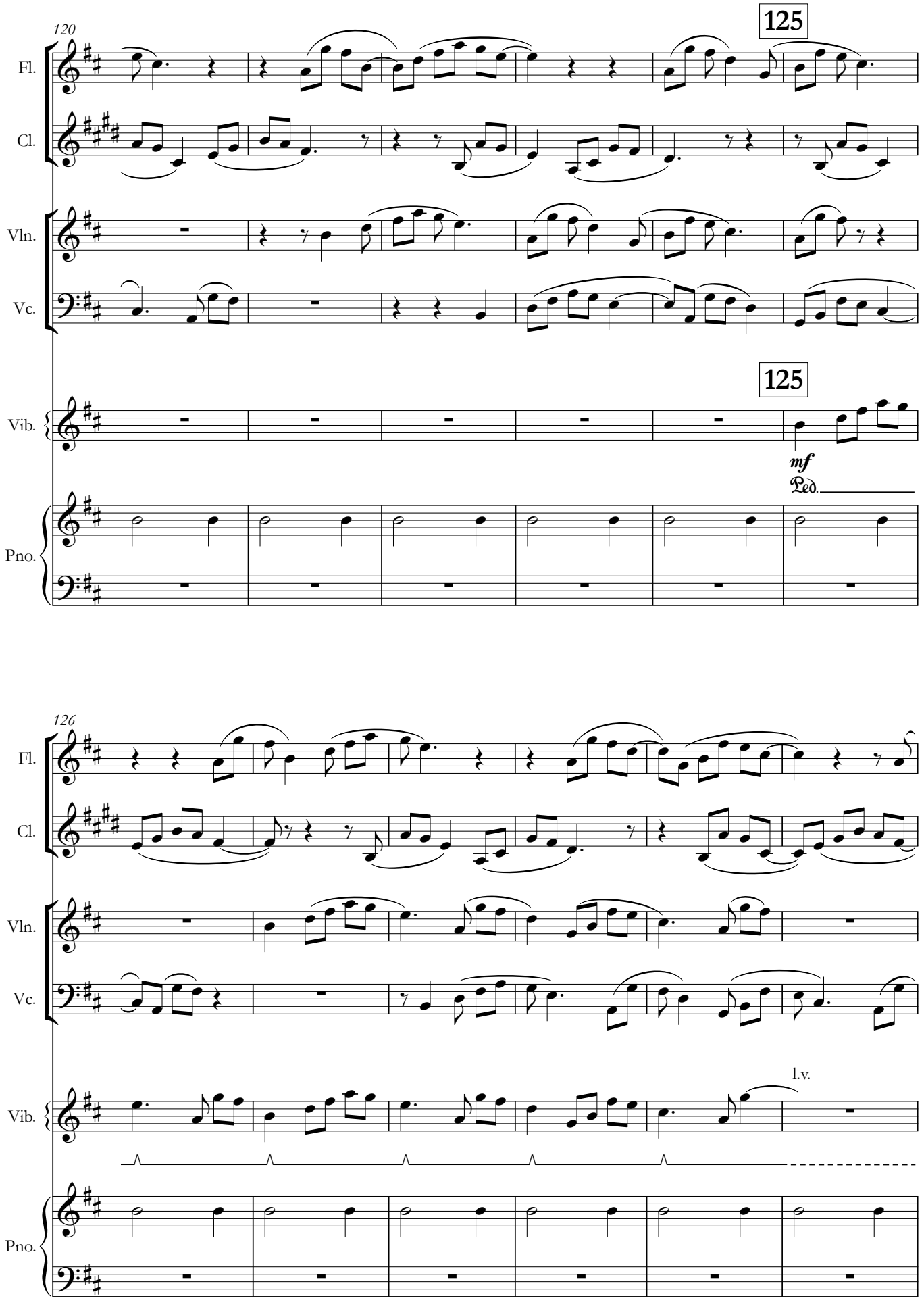

91
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
l.v.
mf
Pno.

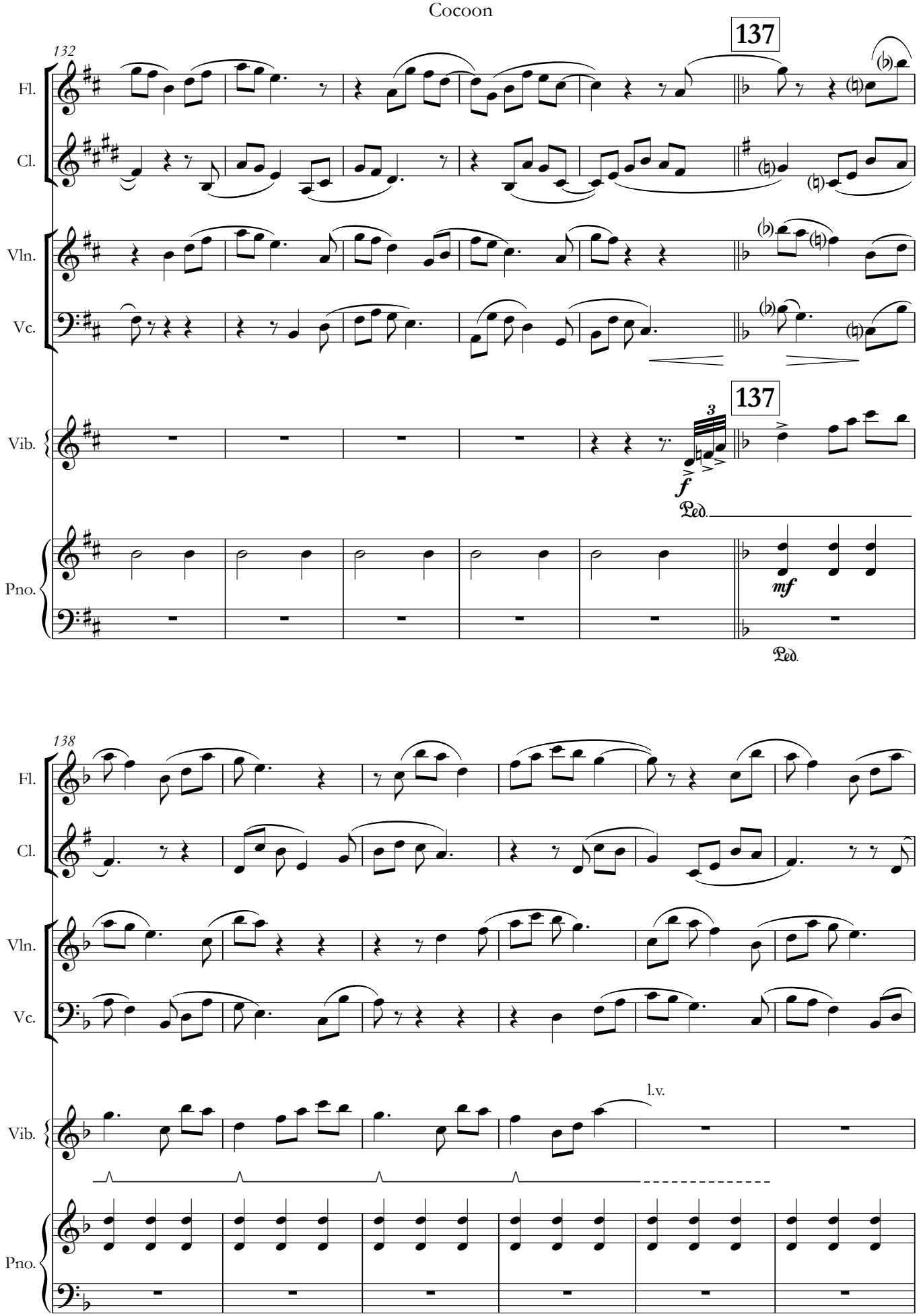

99
97
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
99
Vib.
mp
Ped.
Pno.

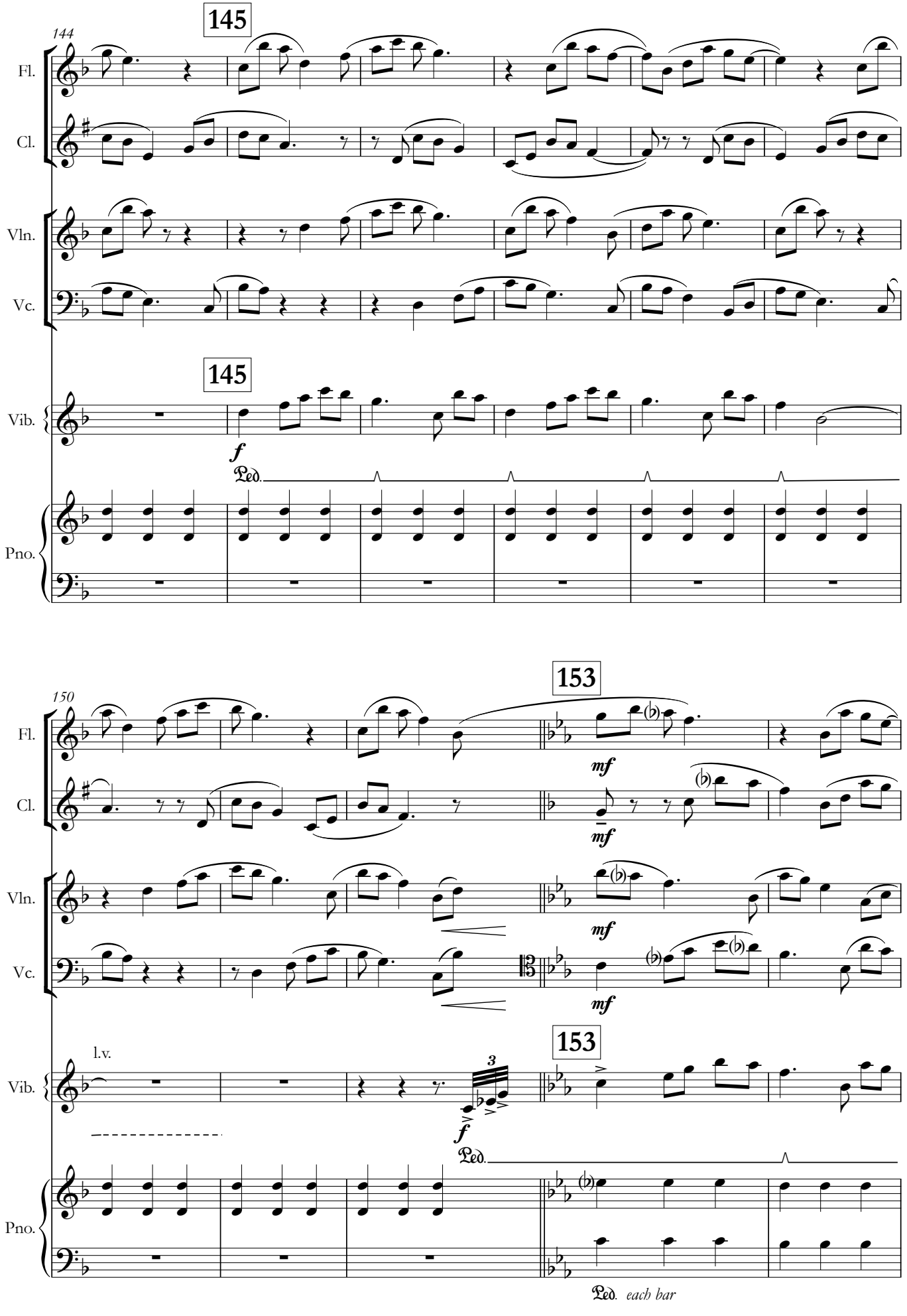

103
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.

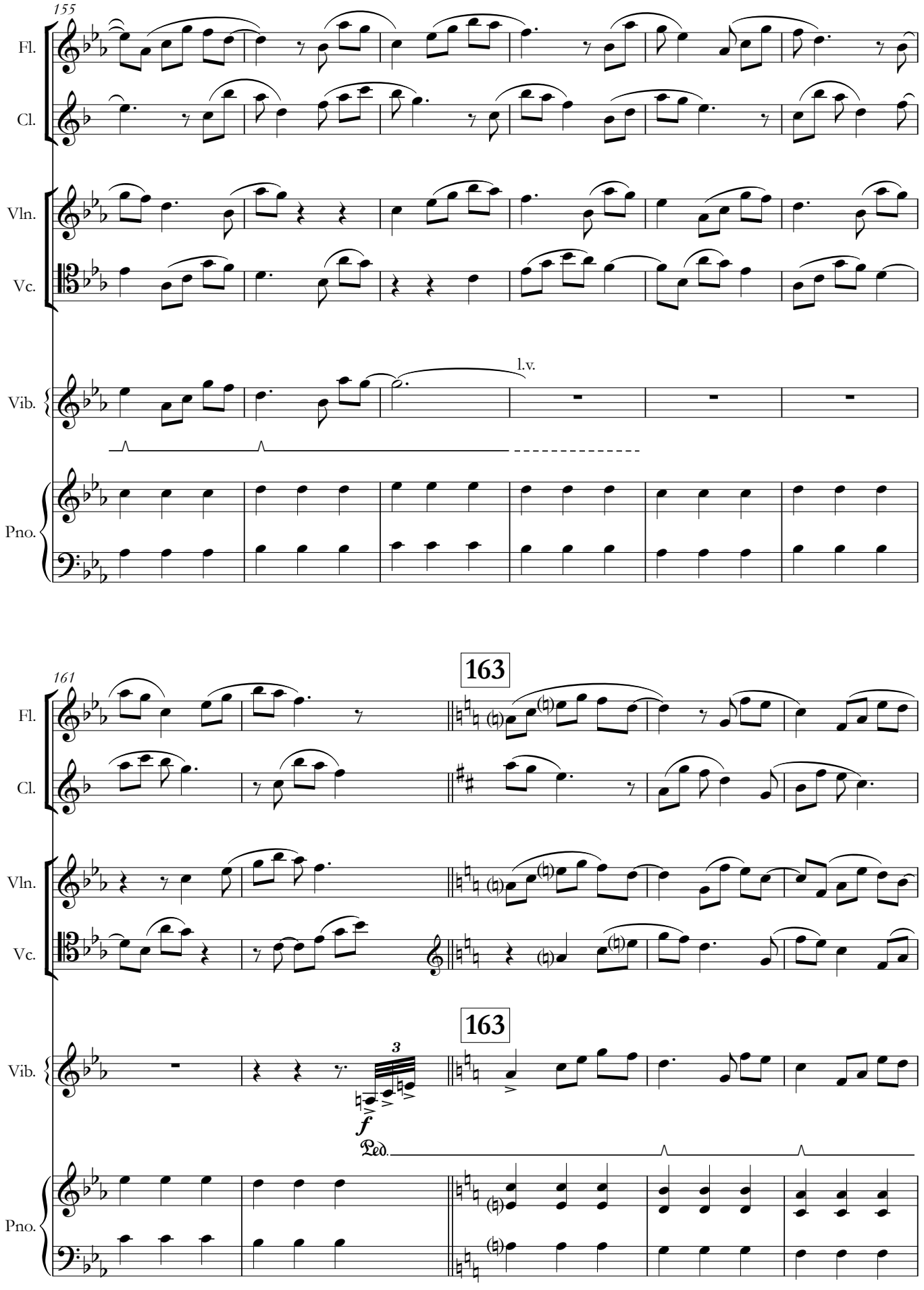

Cocoon
109
111
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
mp
mf
Ped.
114
l.v.

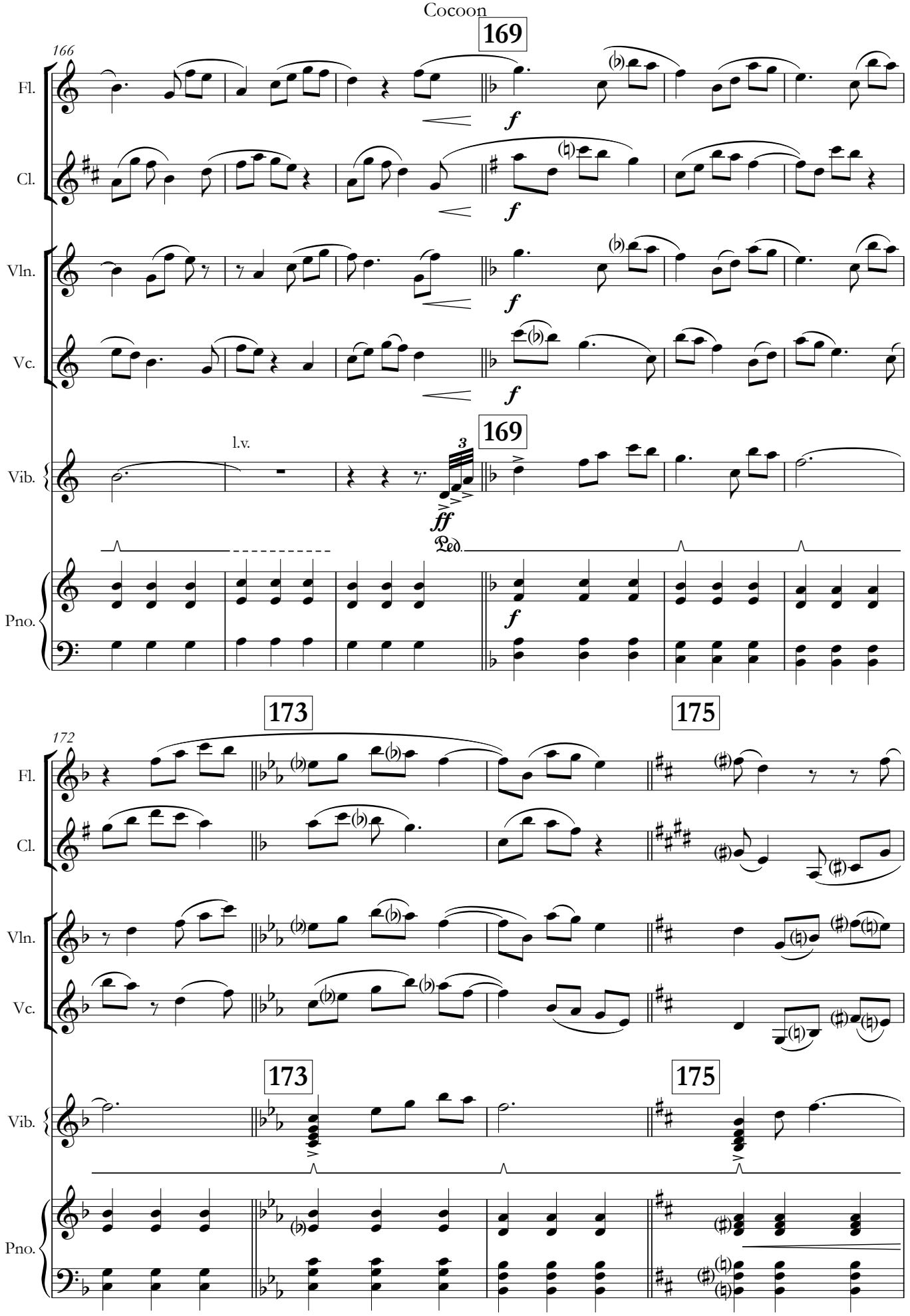
Cocoon

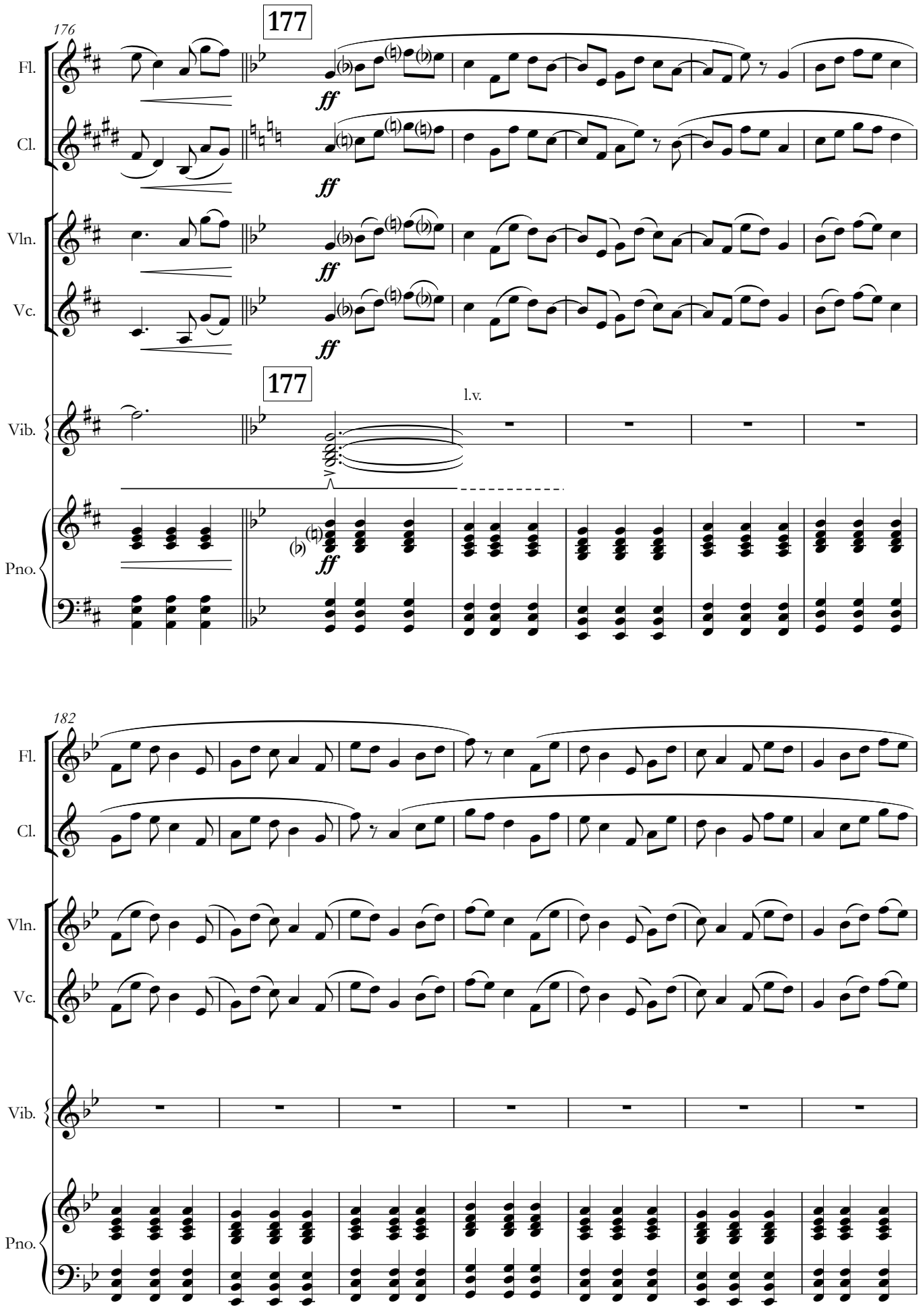



132
137
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
137
3
Vib.
f
Ped.
Pno.
mf
Ped.
138
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.

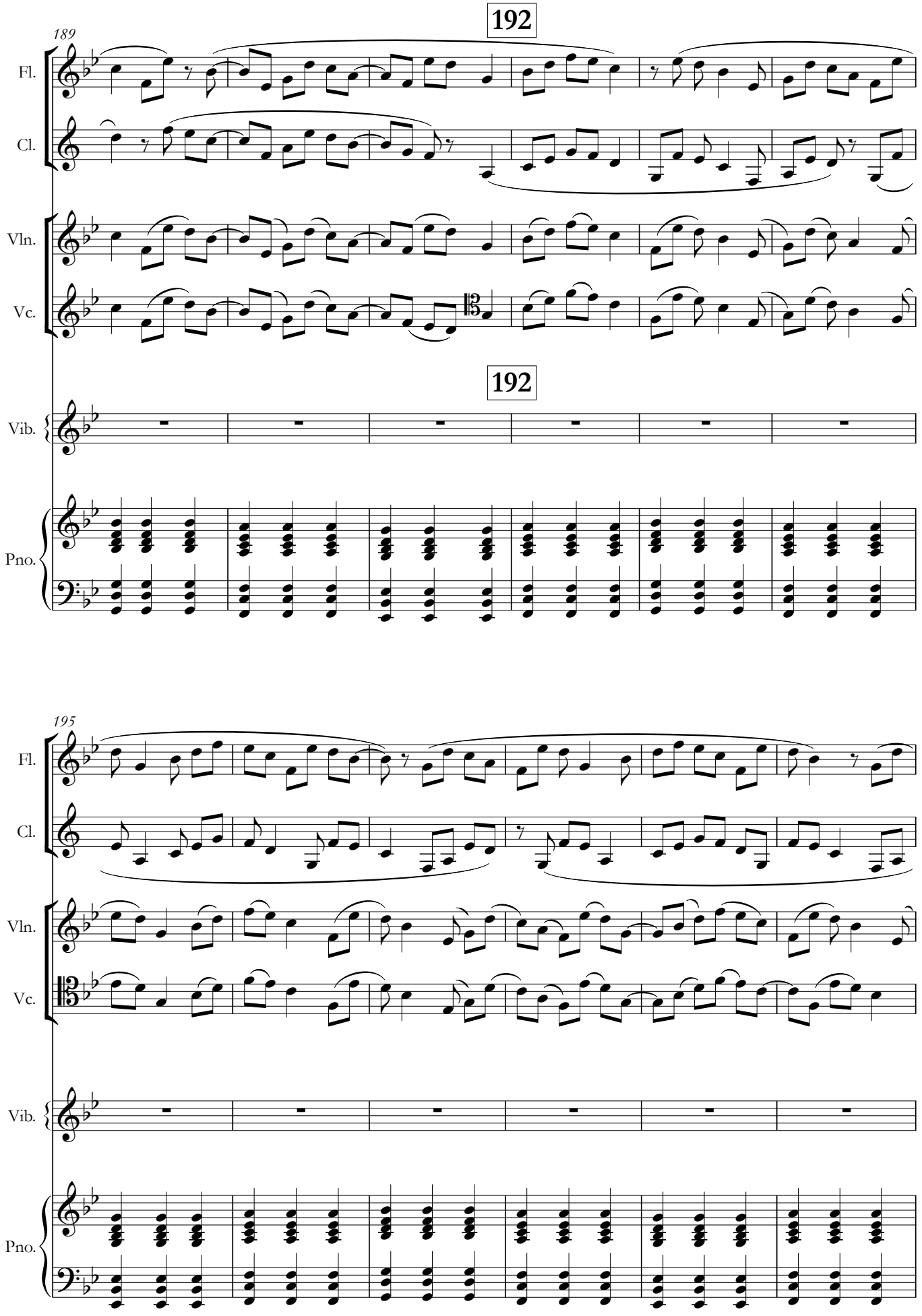

145
144
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
145
Vib.
f
Ped.
Pno.
153
150
Fl.
mf
Cl.
mf
Vln.
mf
Vc.
mf
153
l.v.
Vib.
3
f
Ped.
Pno.
Ped. each bar

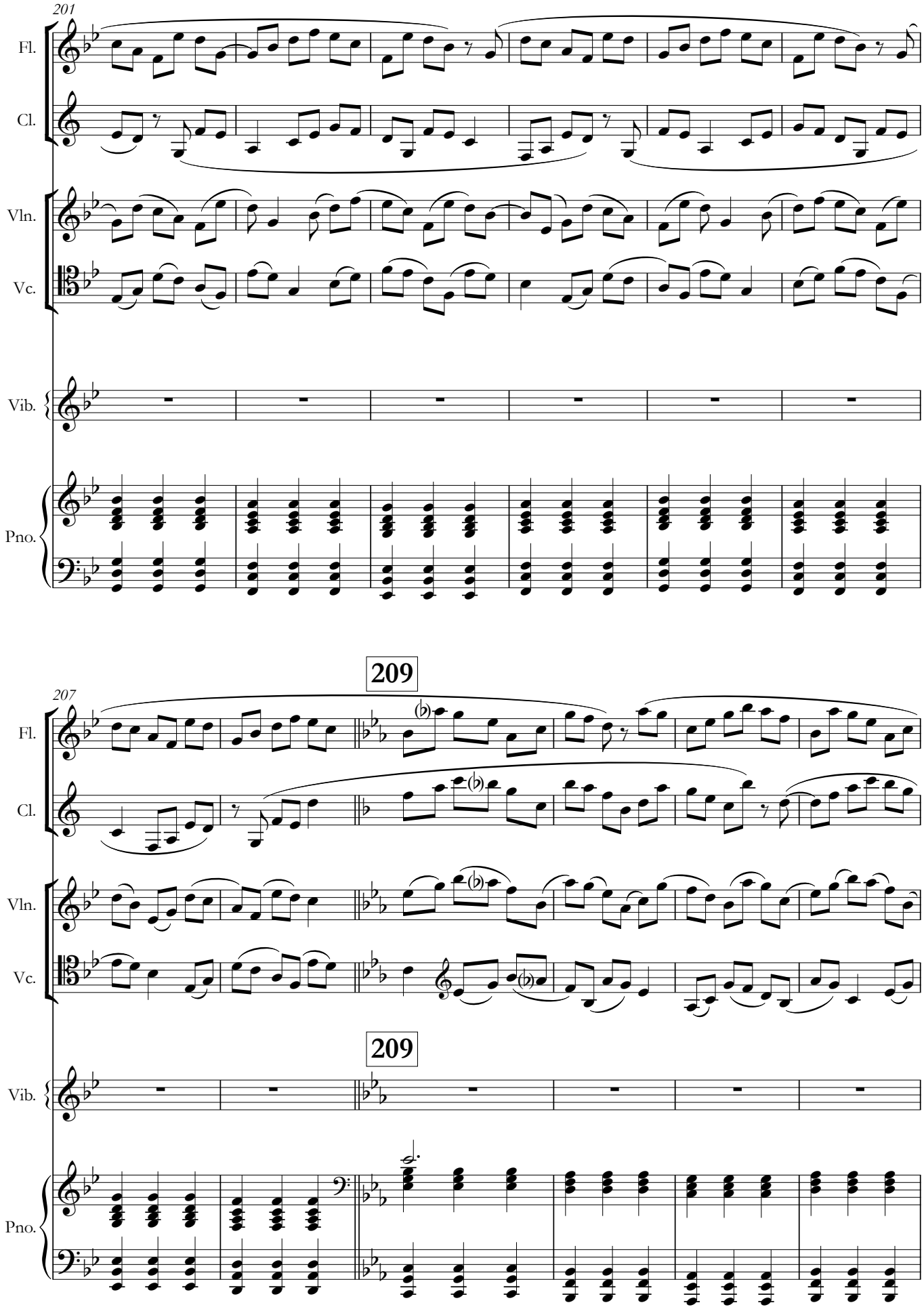

155
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.
161
163
163
3
f
Ped.


166
169
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
3
Vib.
Pno.
Ped.
172
173
175

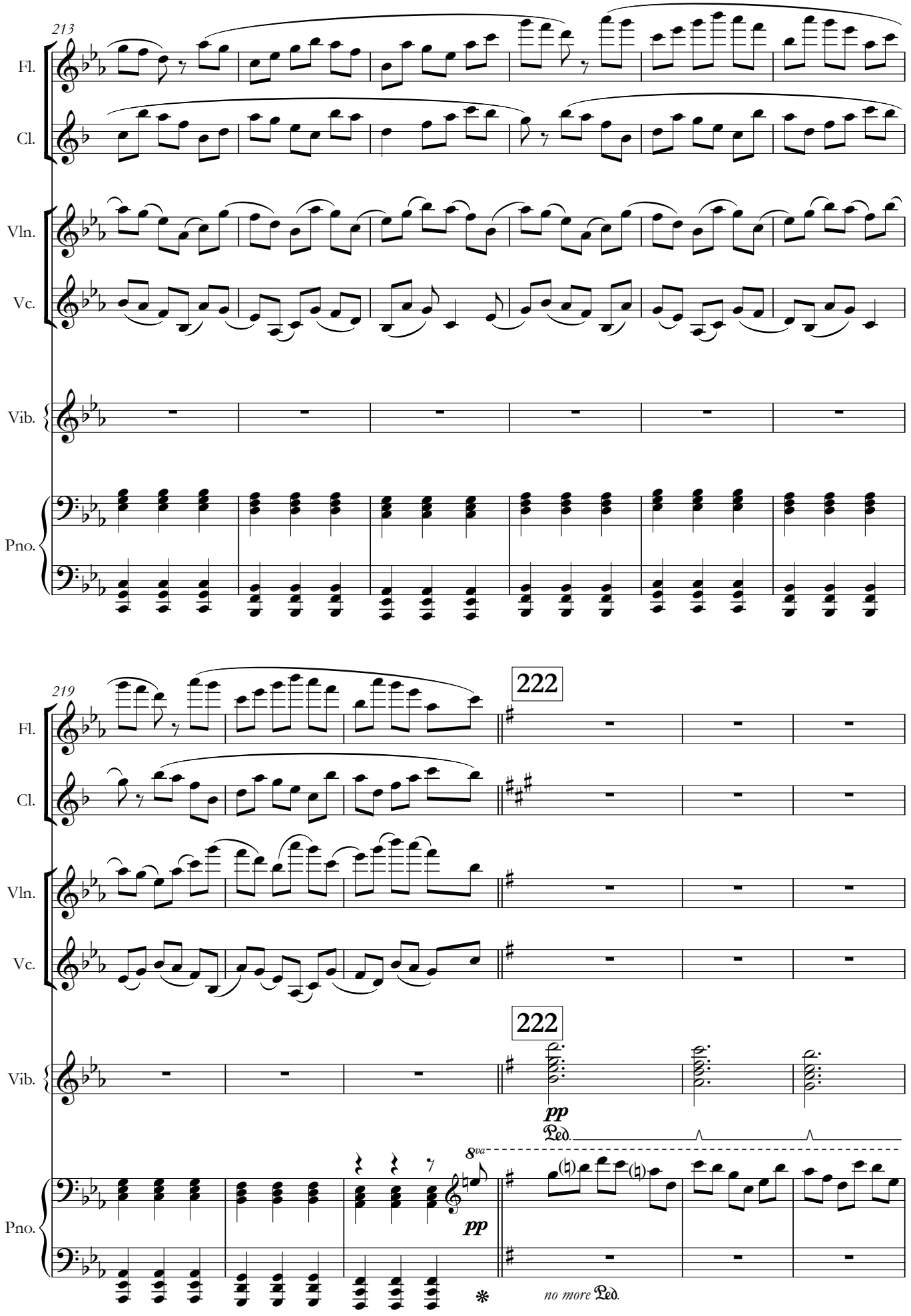

176
177
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
ff
177
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.
182
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.

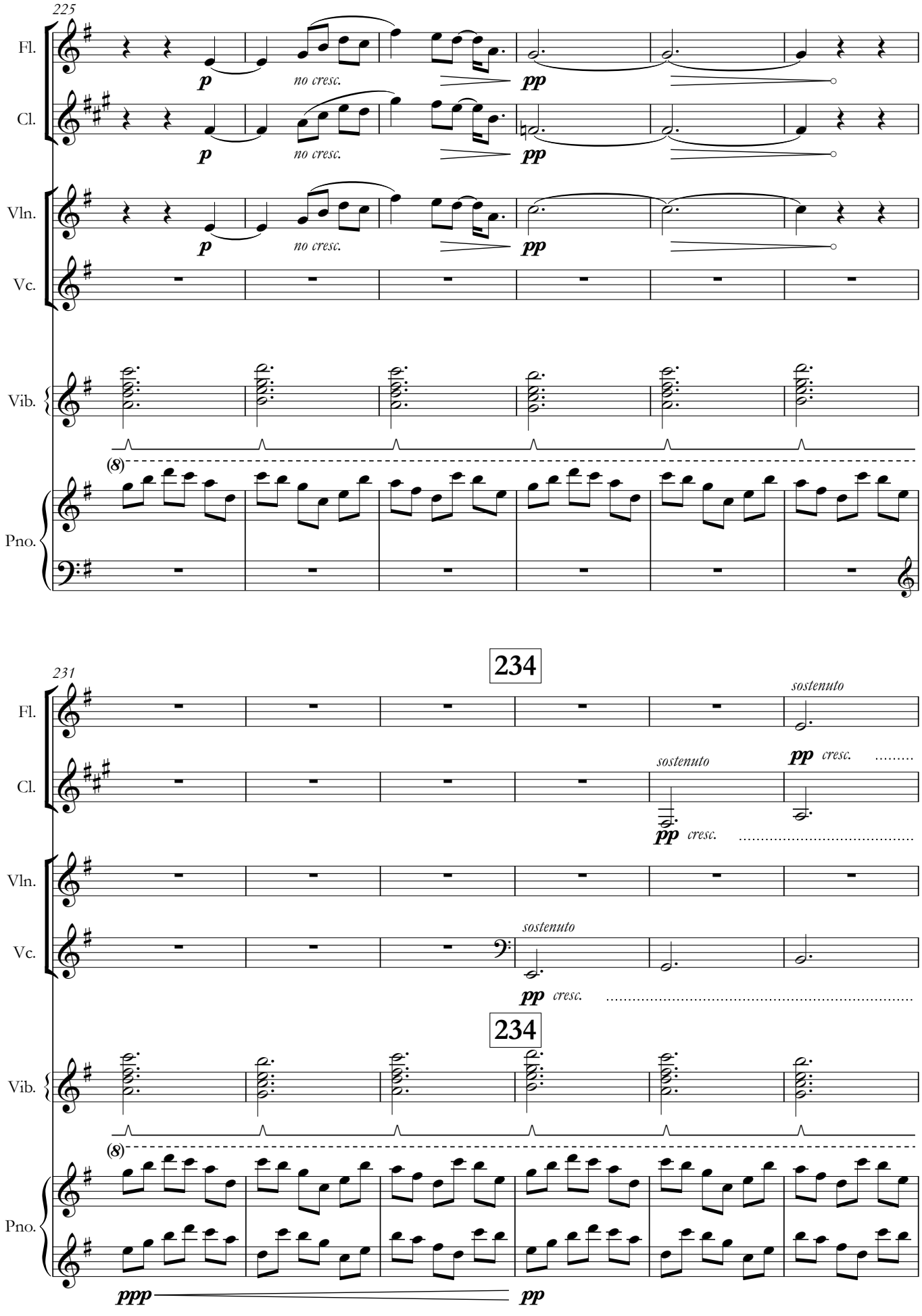
Cocoon

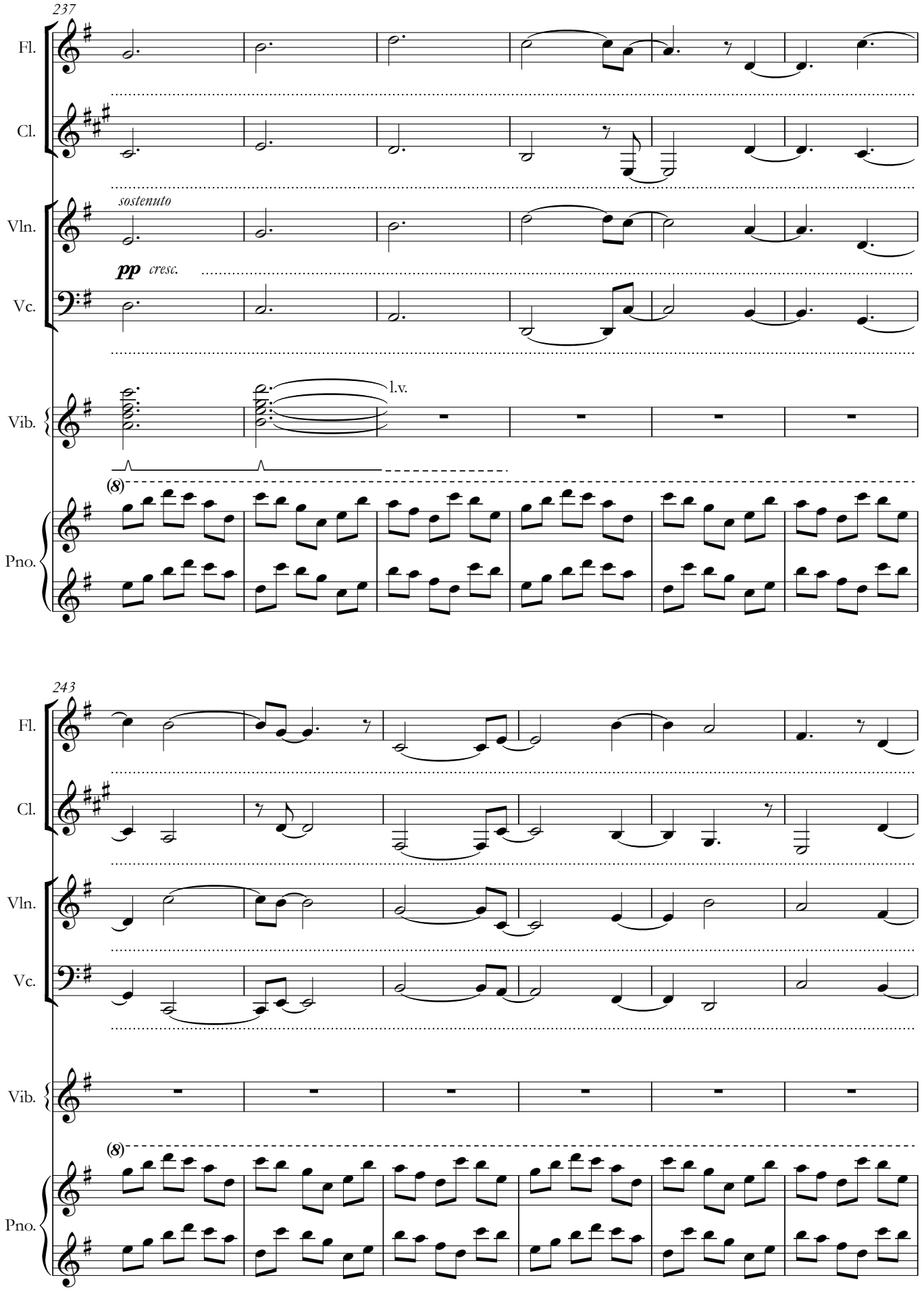


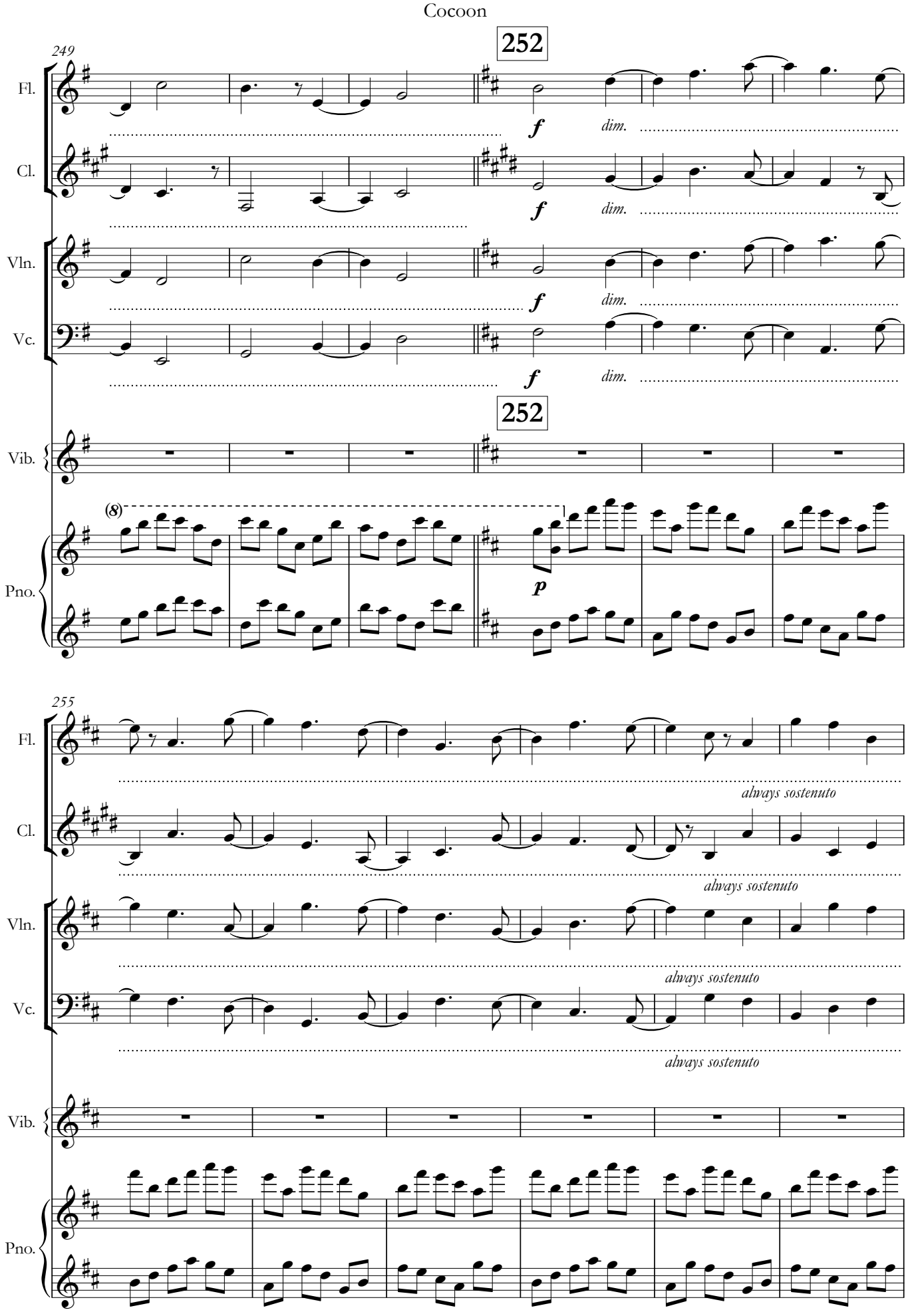

201
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
209
207
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
209
Vib.
Pno.

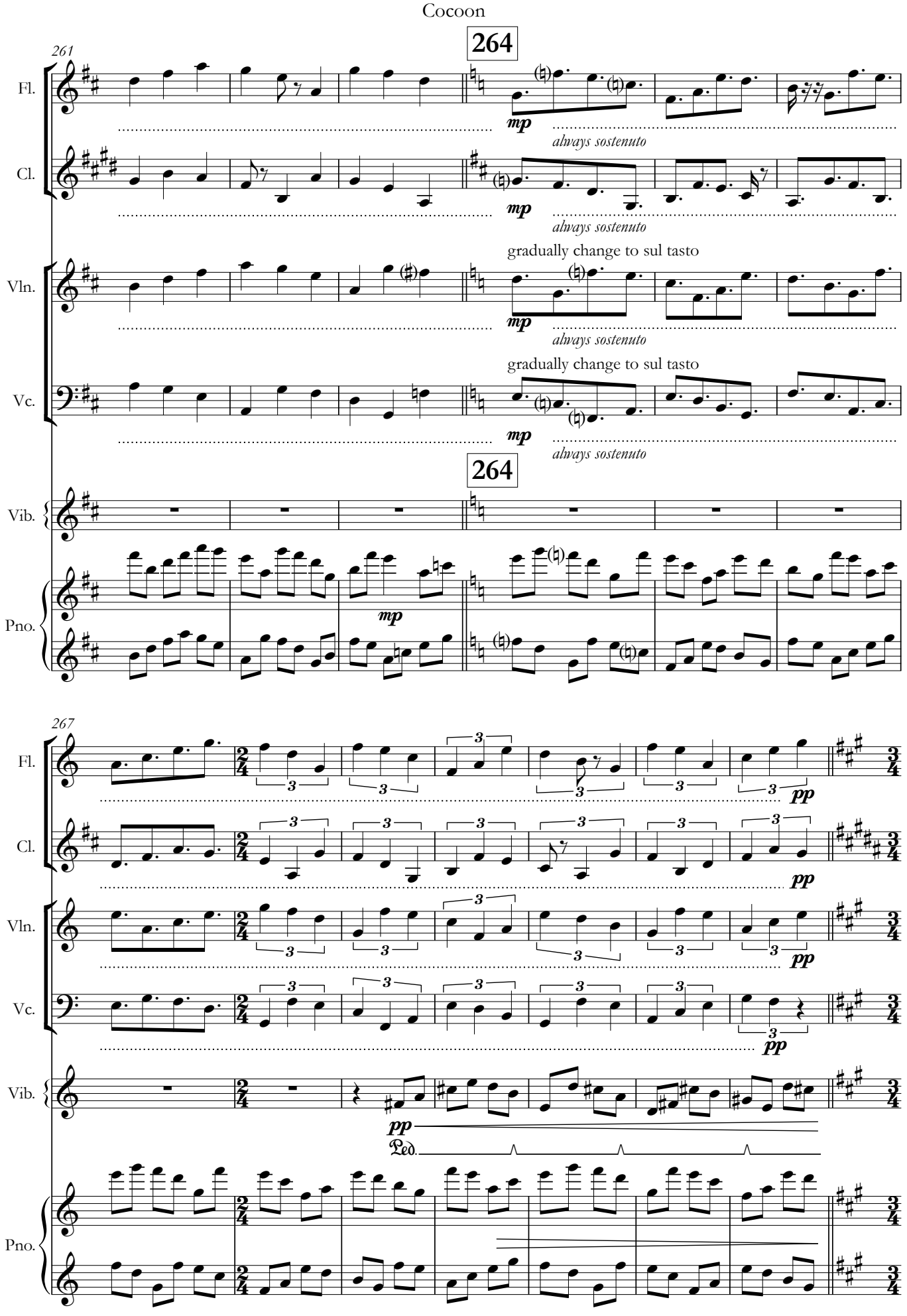
Cocoon

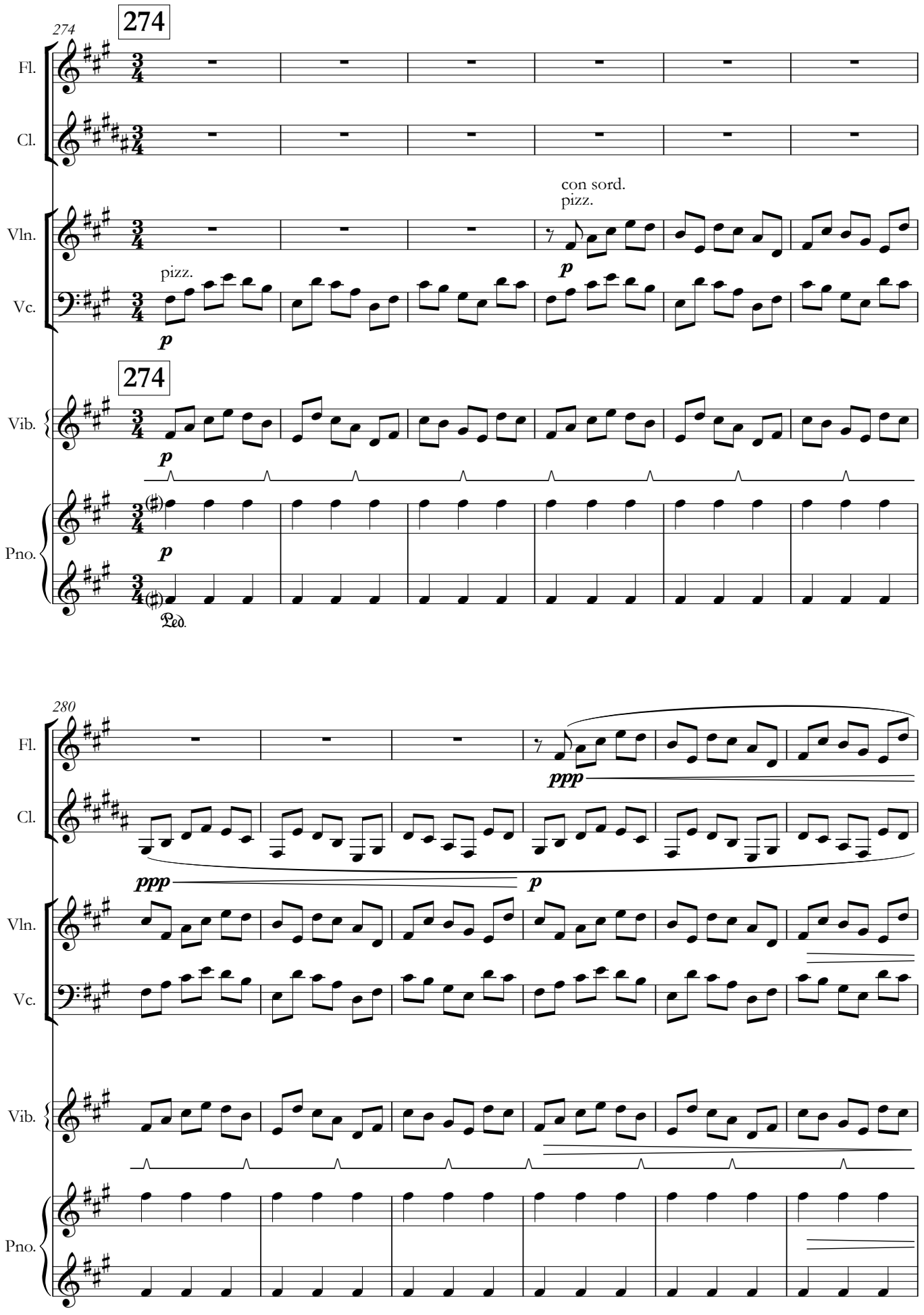


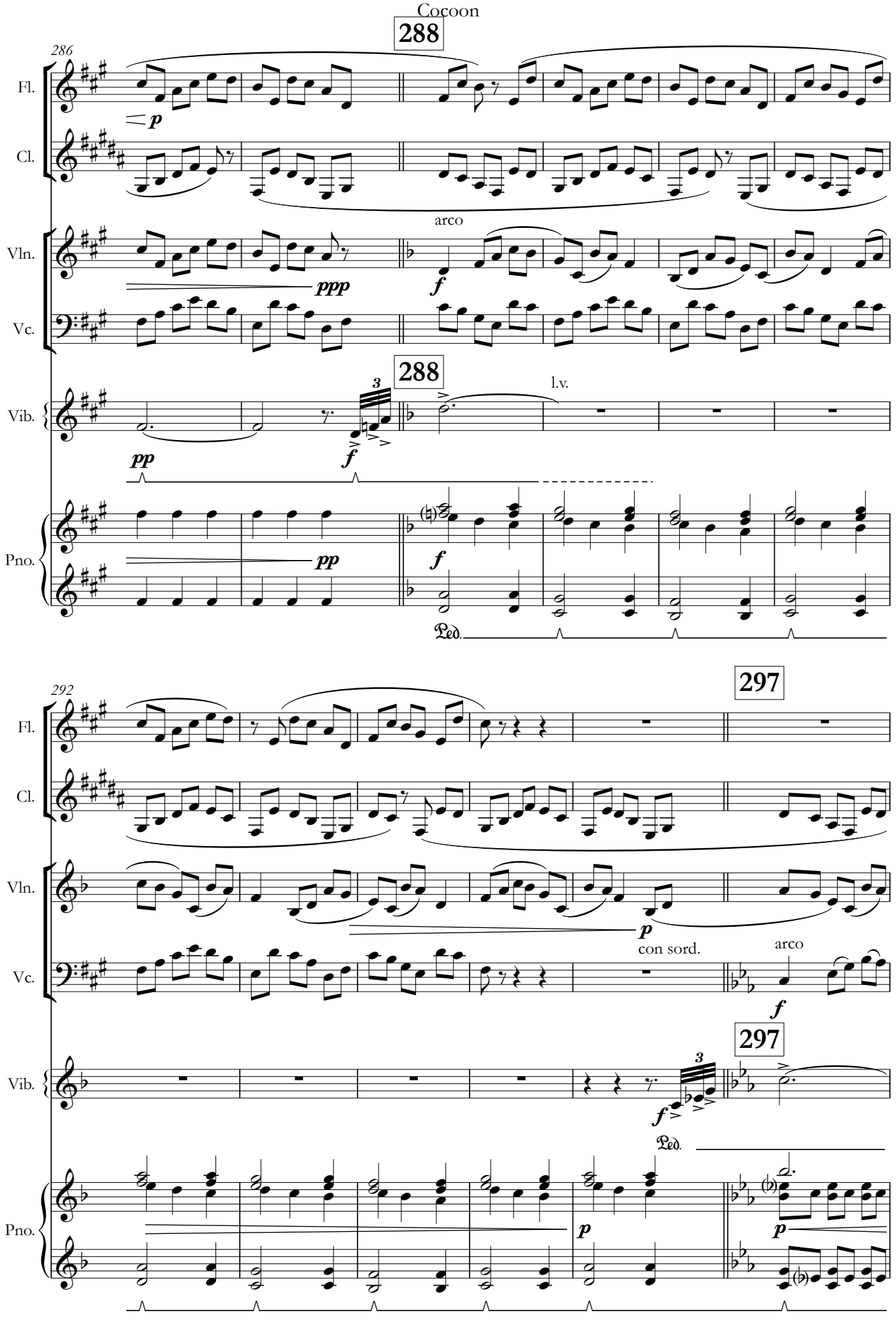

225
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
p
no cresc.
pp
(8)
234
231
sostenuto
pp cresc.
ppp

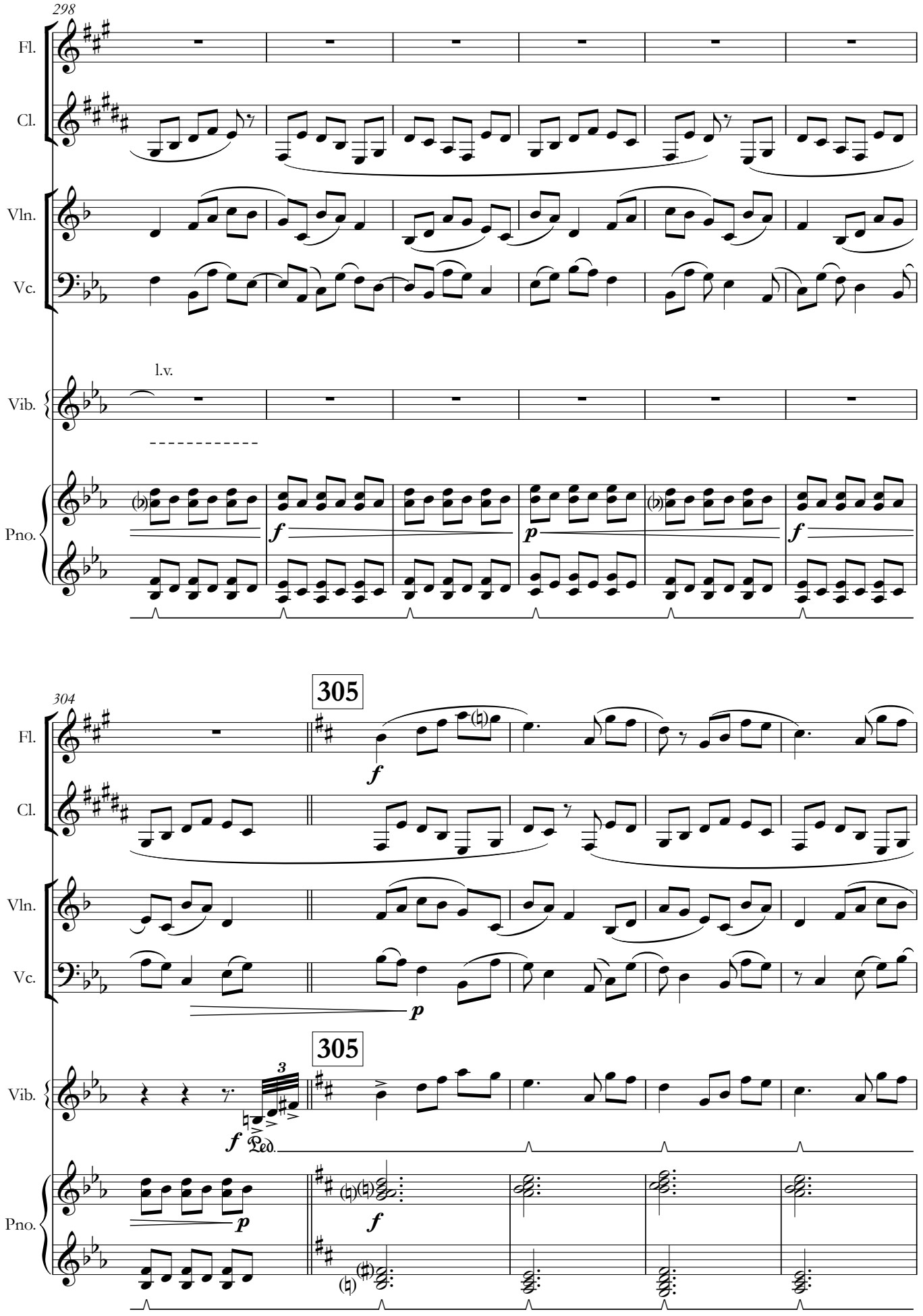

237
Fl.
Cl.
sostenuto
Vln.
pp cresc.
Vc.
Vib.
l.v.
(8)
Pno.
243
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
(8)
Pno.


Cocoon
249
252
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
f
dim.
252
Vib.
Pno.
(8)
p
255
always sostenuto

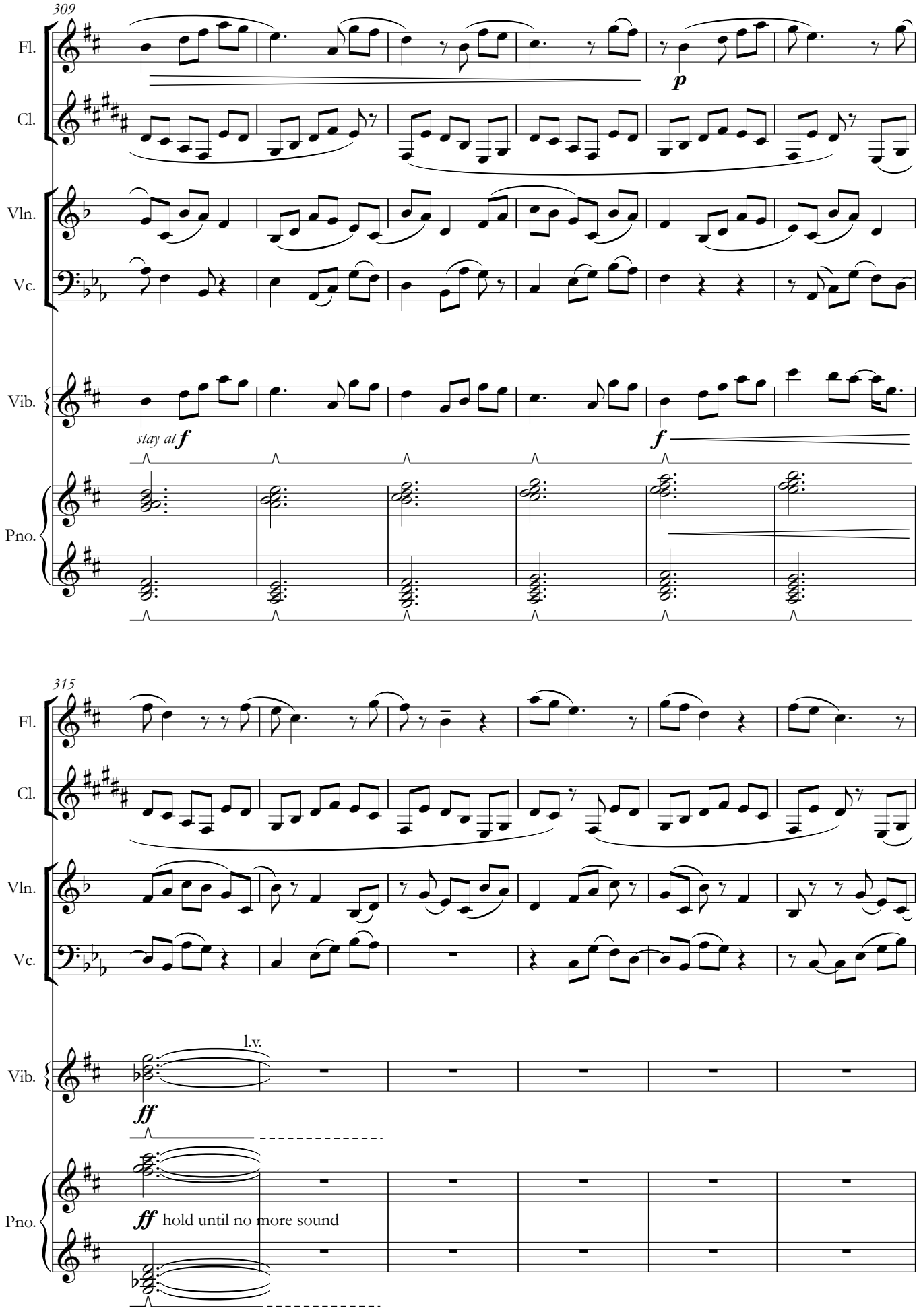

Cocoon
264
261
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
mp
always sostenuto
gradually change to sul tasto
264
267
pp
Ped.

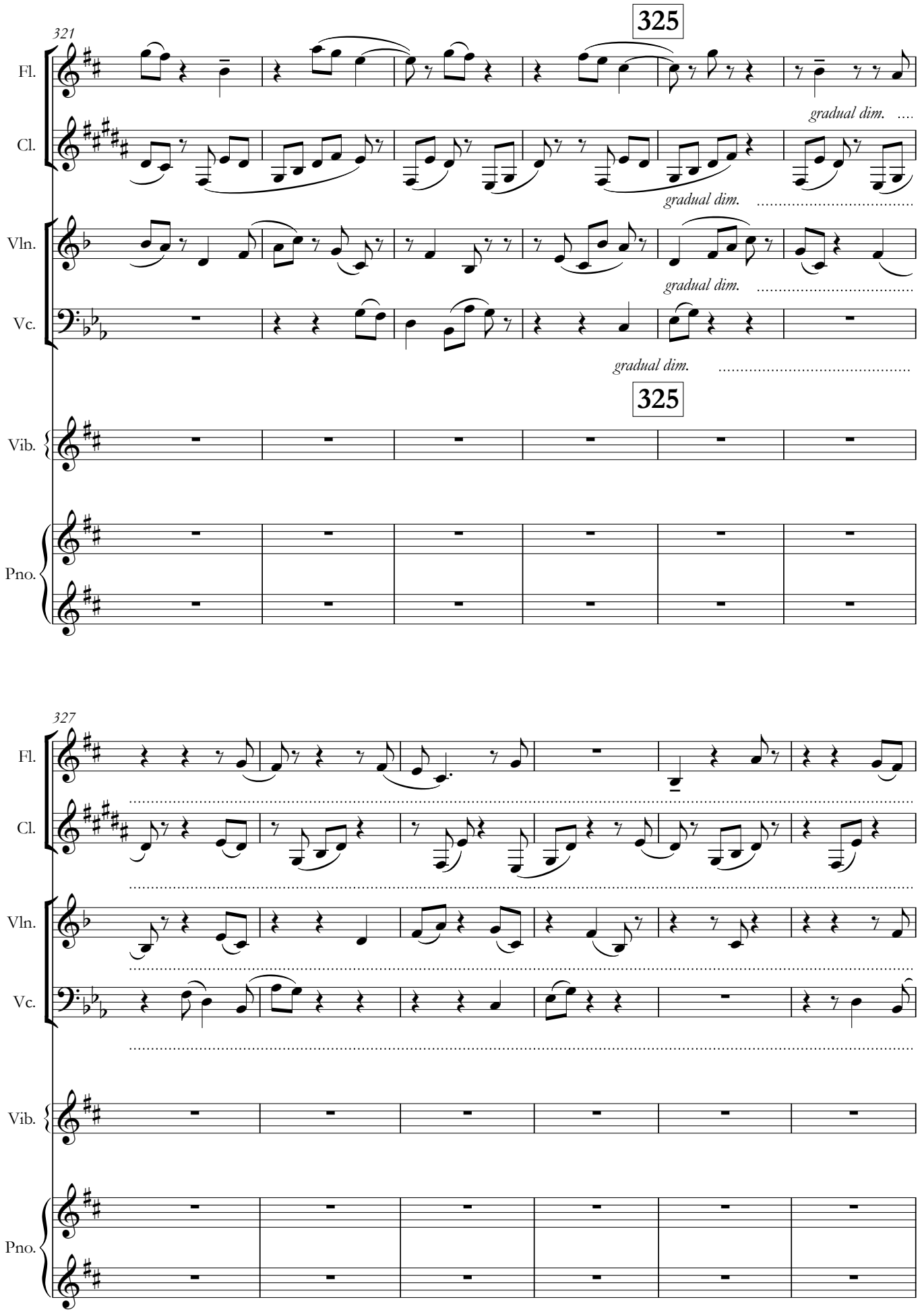

274
274
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
con sord.
pizz.
pizz.
p
Ped.
280
ppp
ppp
p


Cocoon
288
286
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
p
ppp
arco
f
288
3
l.v.
pp
f
pp
f
Ped.
297
292
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
p
con sord.
arco
f
297
3
f
Ped.
p
p

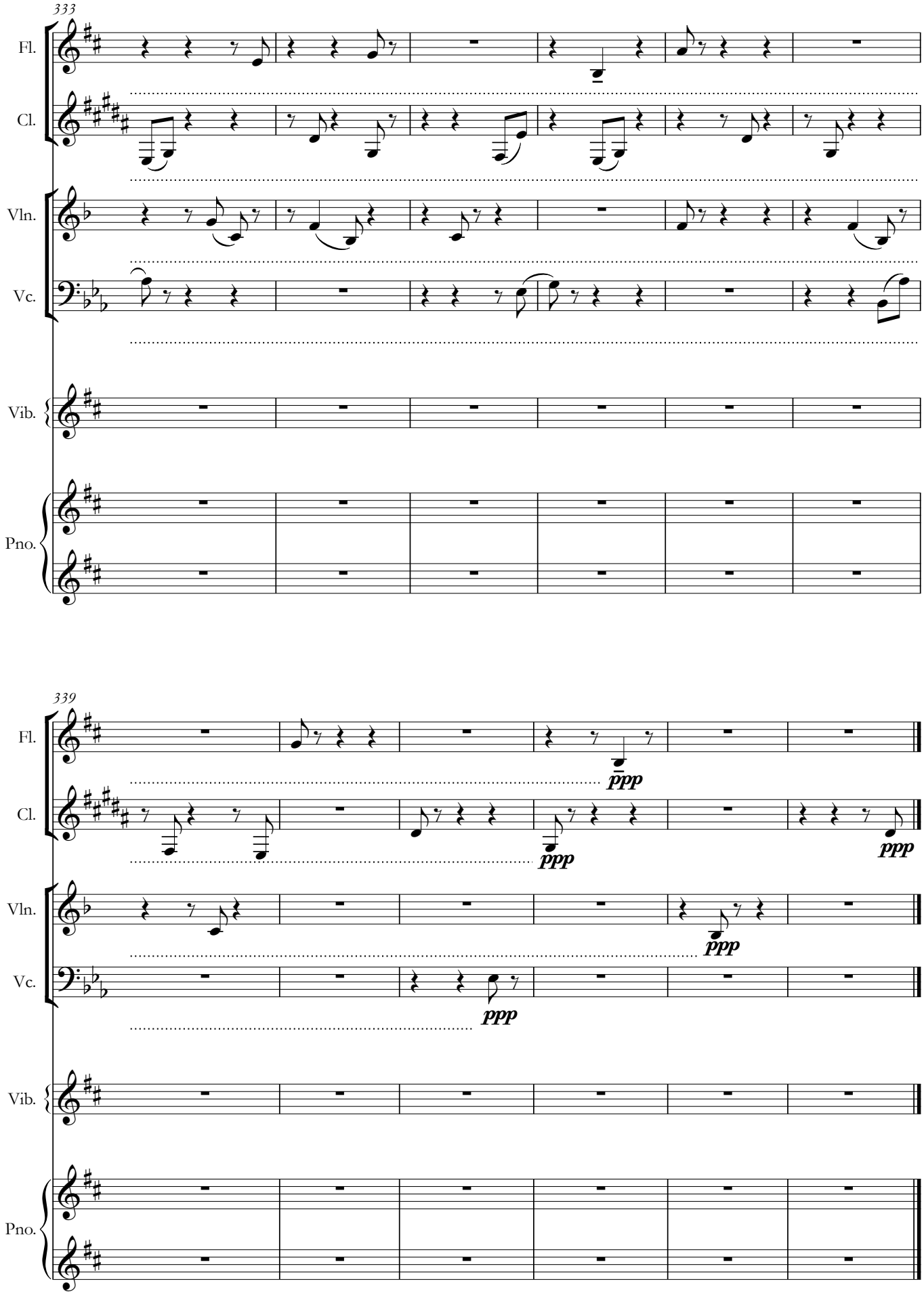

298
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
l.v.
Vib.
Pno.
f
p
f
304
305
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
p
305
Vib.
3
f
Ped.
Pno.
p
f

Cocoon


309
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
p
stay at f
f
315
l.v.
ff
ff hold until no more sound


325
321
Fl.
Cl.
gradual dim.
Vln.
gradual dim.
Vc.
gradual dim.
325
Vib.
Pno.
327
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.

Cocoon


333
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
339
Fl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Vib.
Pno.
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp

Catcher Variations

piano solo

David John Lang

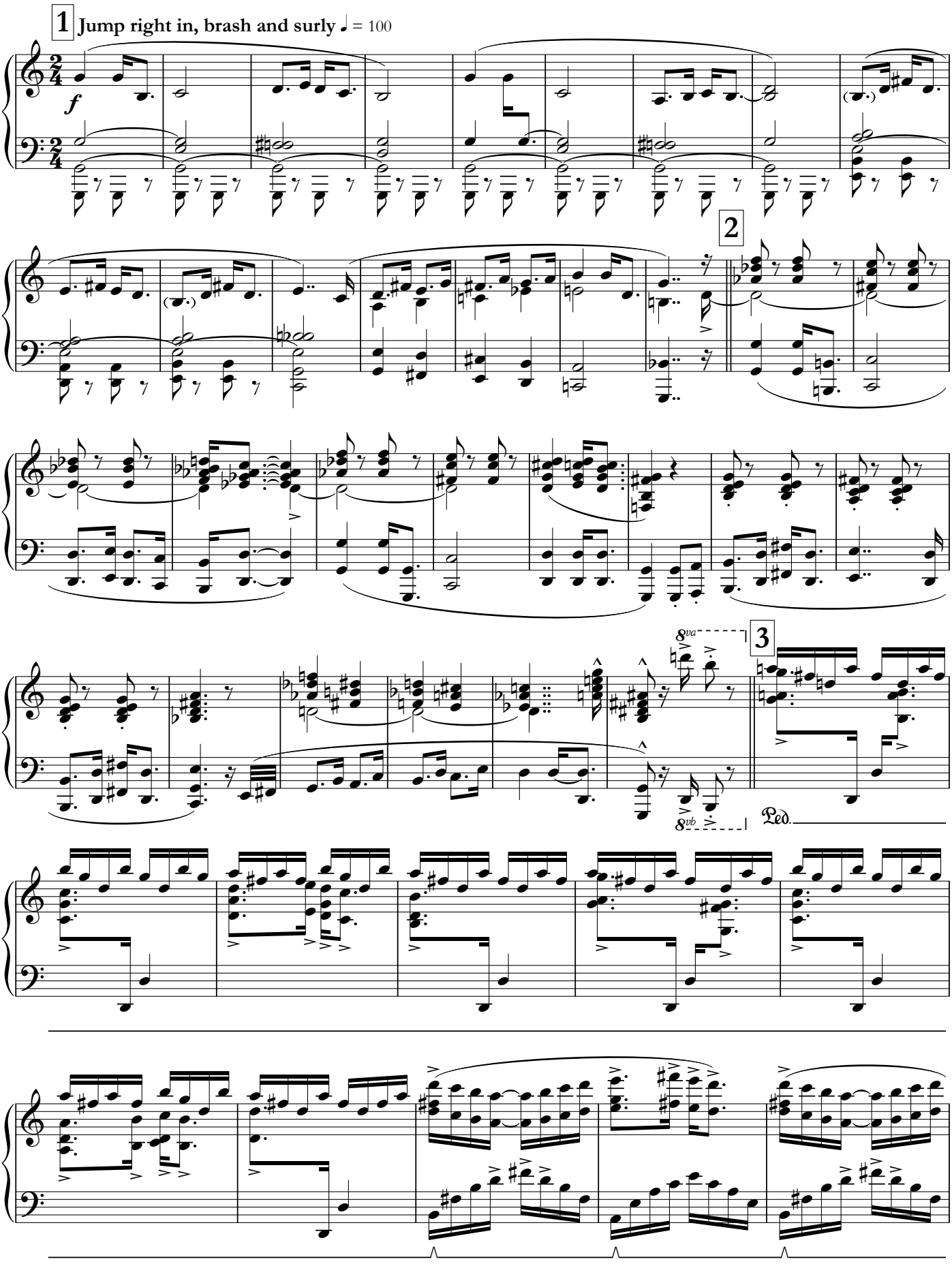
2017

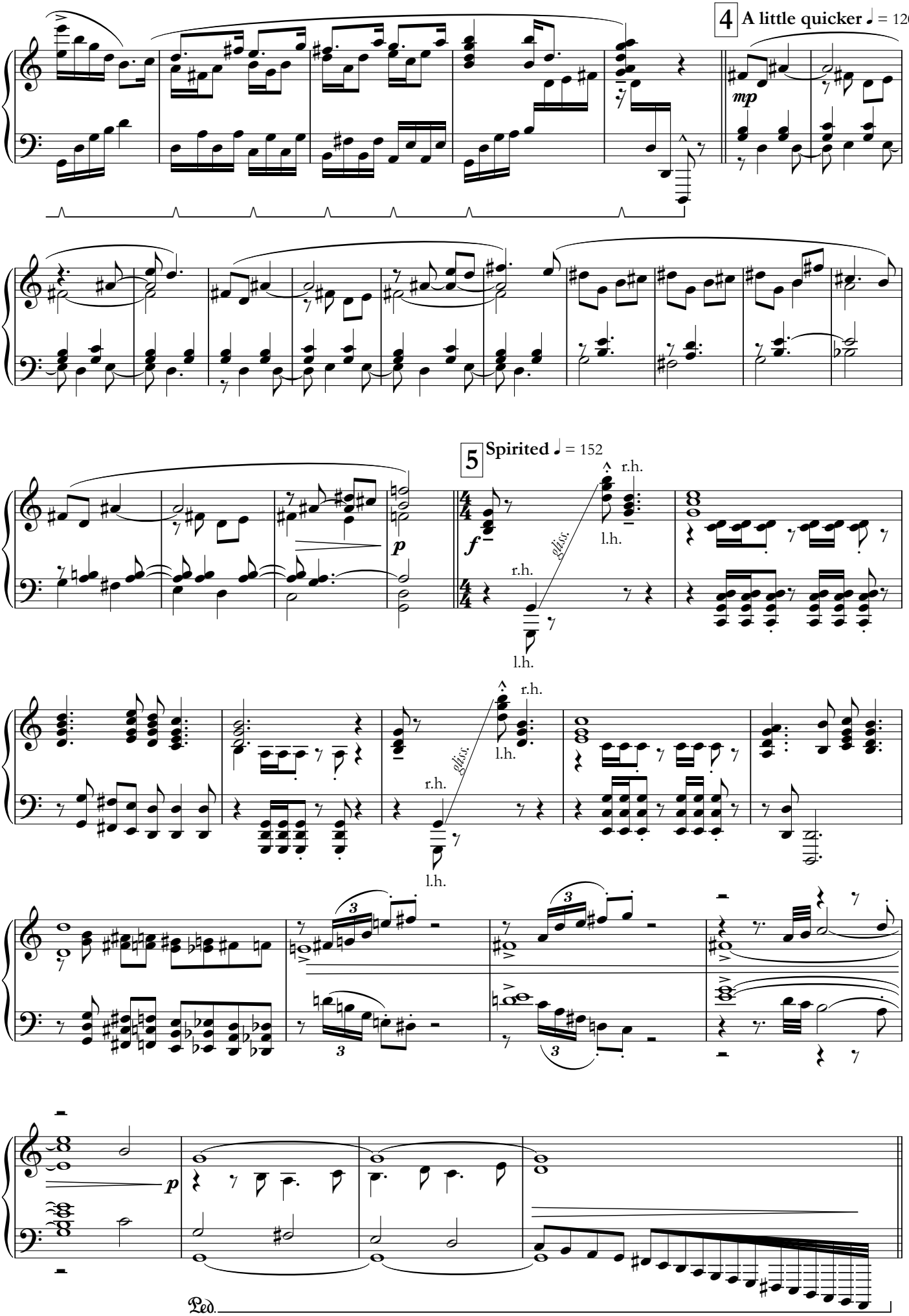
Catcher Variations begins on a left-hand page (overleaf)
in order facilitate better page turns

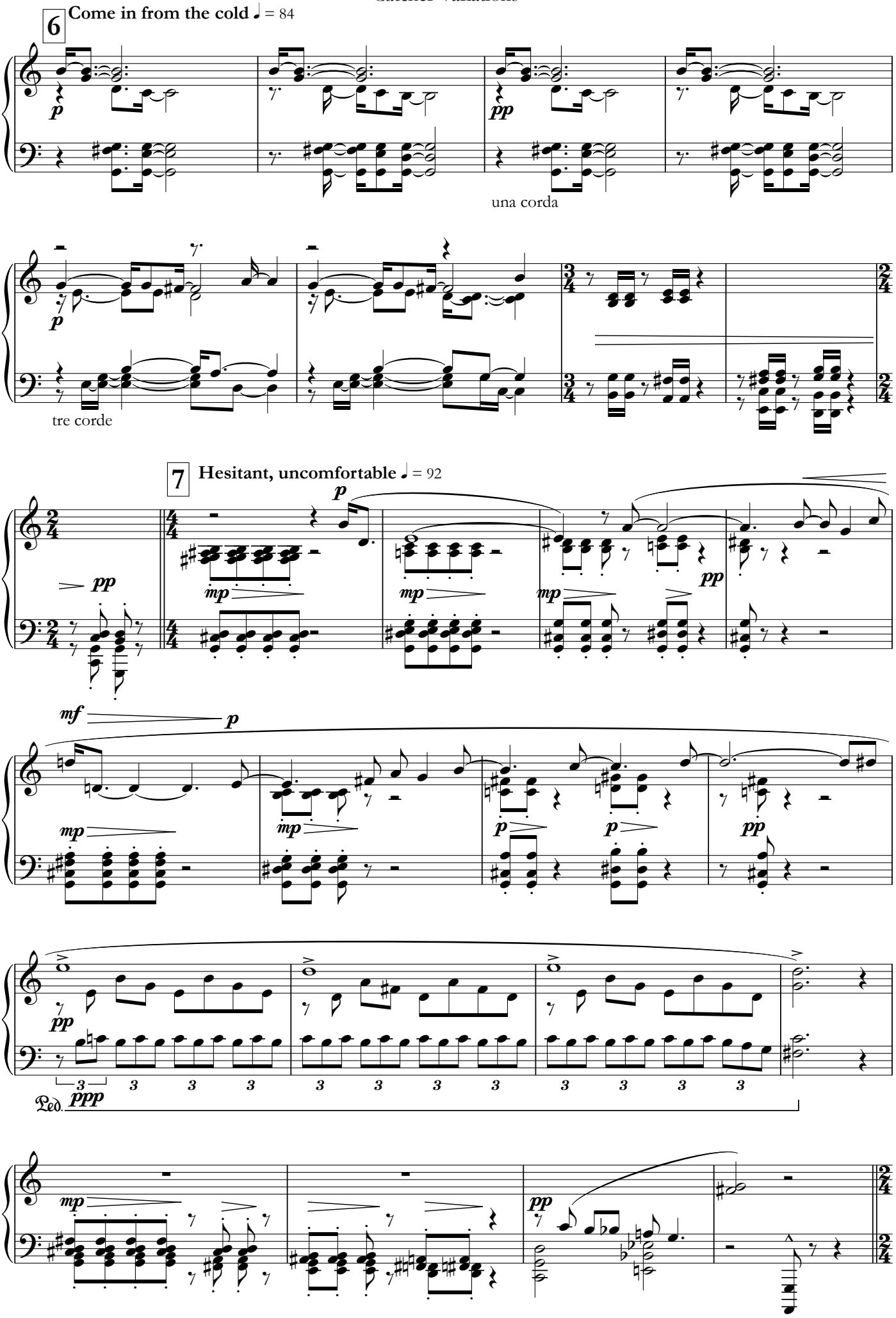
for Stephen, Belinda and Jessica
with thanks to Peter McMillan and Diana Harris

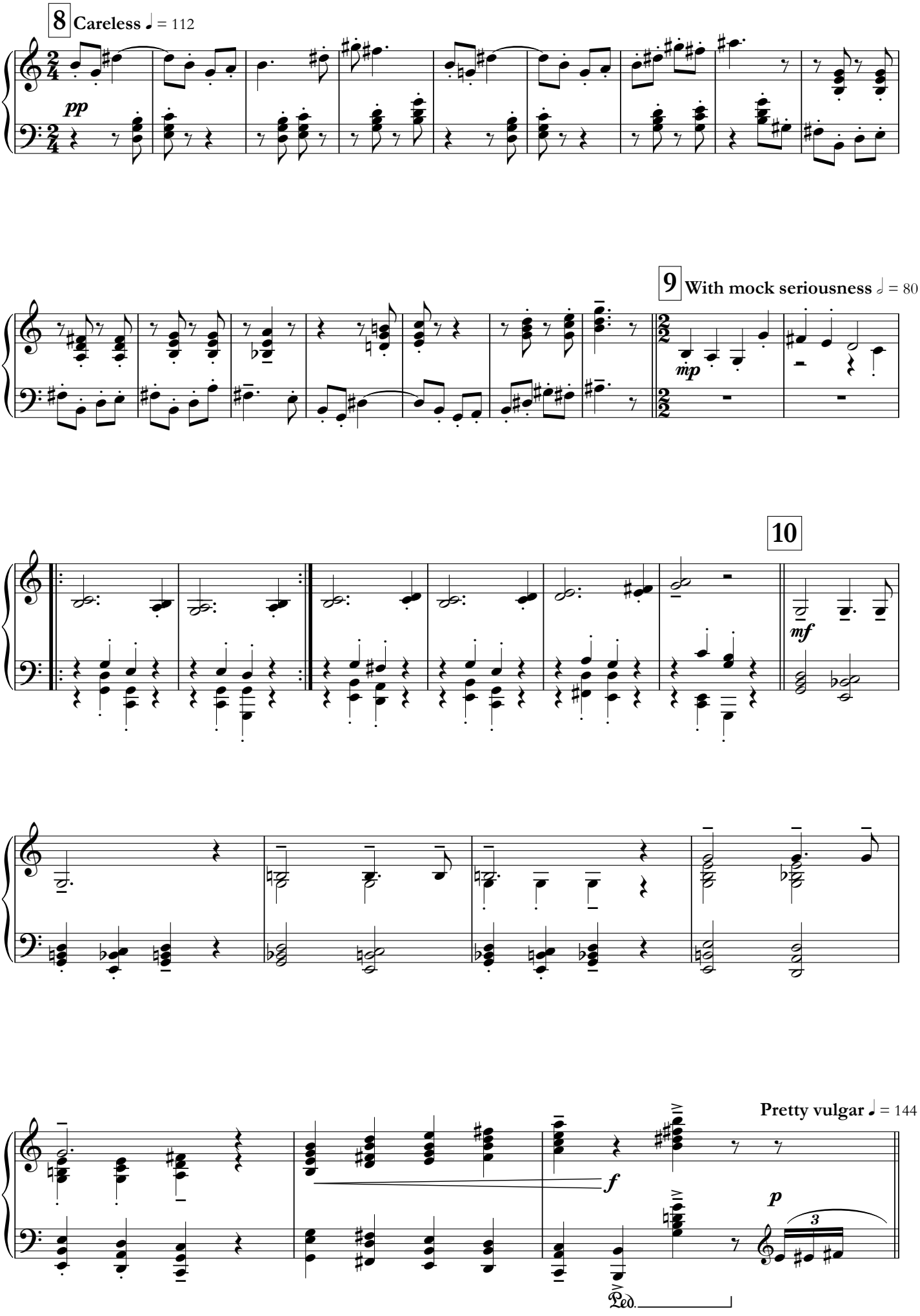
Catcher Variations

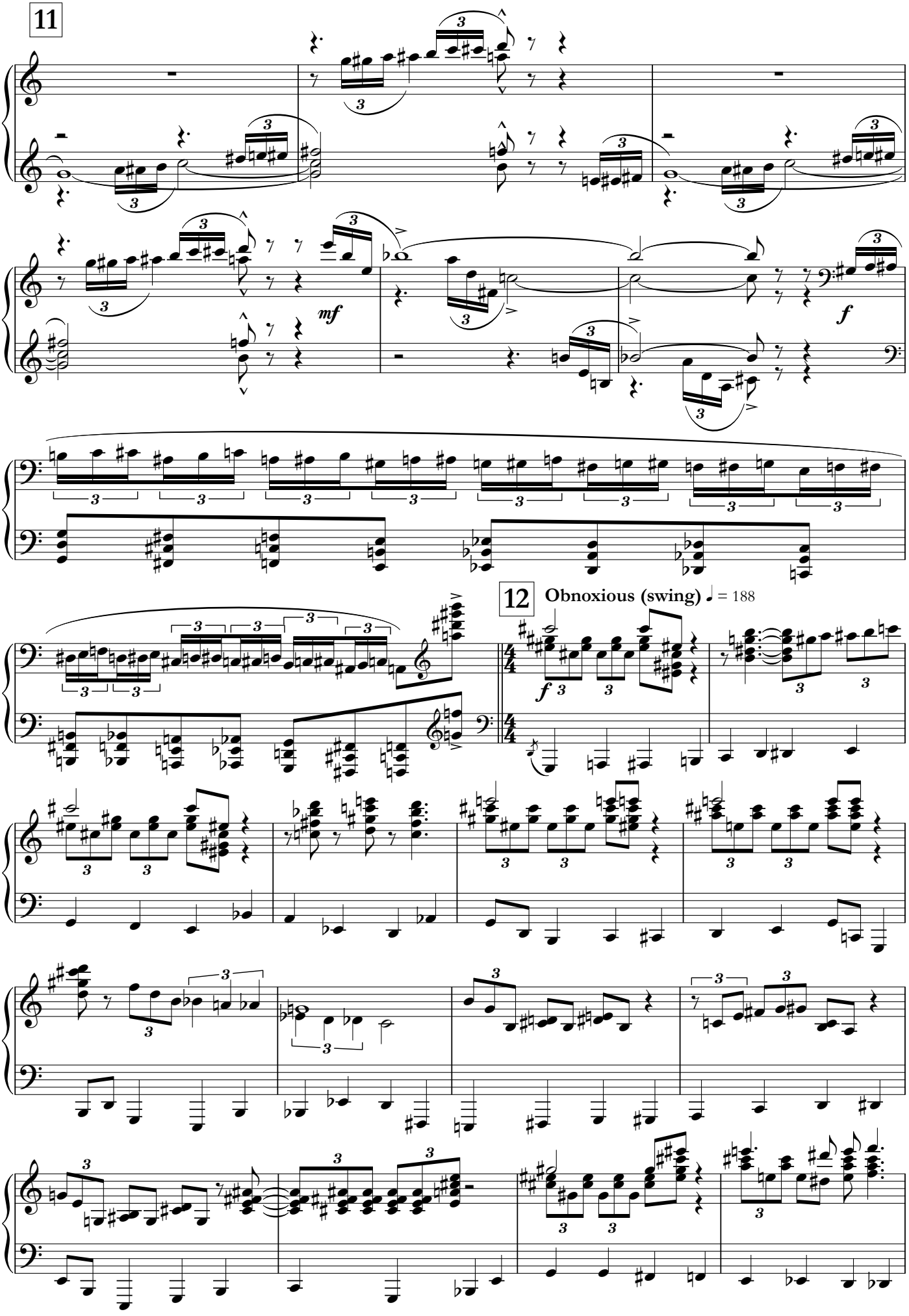
David John Lang




4 A little quicker ♩ = 120
mp
5 Spirited ♩ = 152
f
p
r.h.
l.h.
dim.
3
Ped.

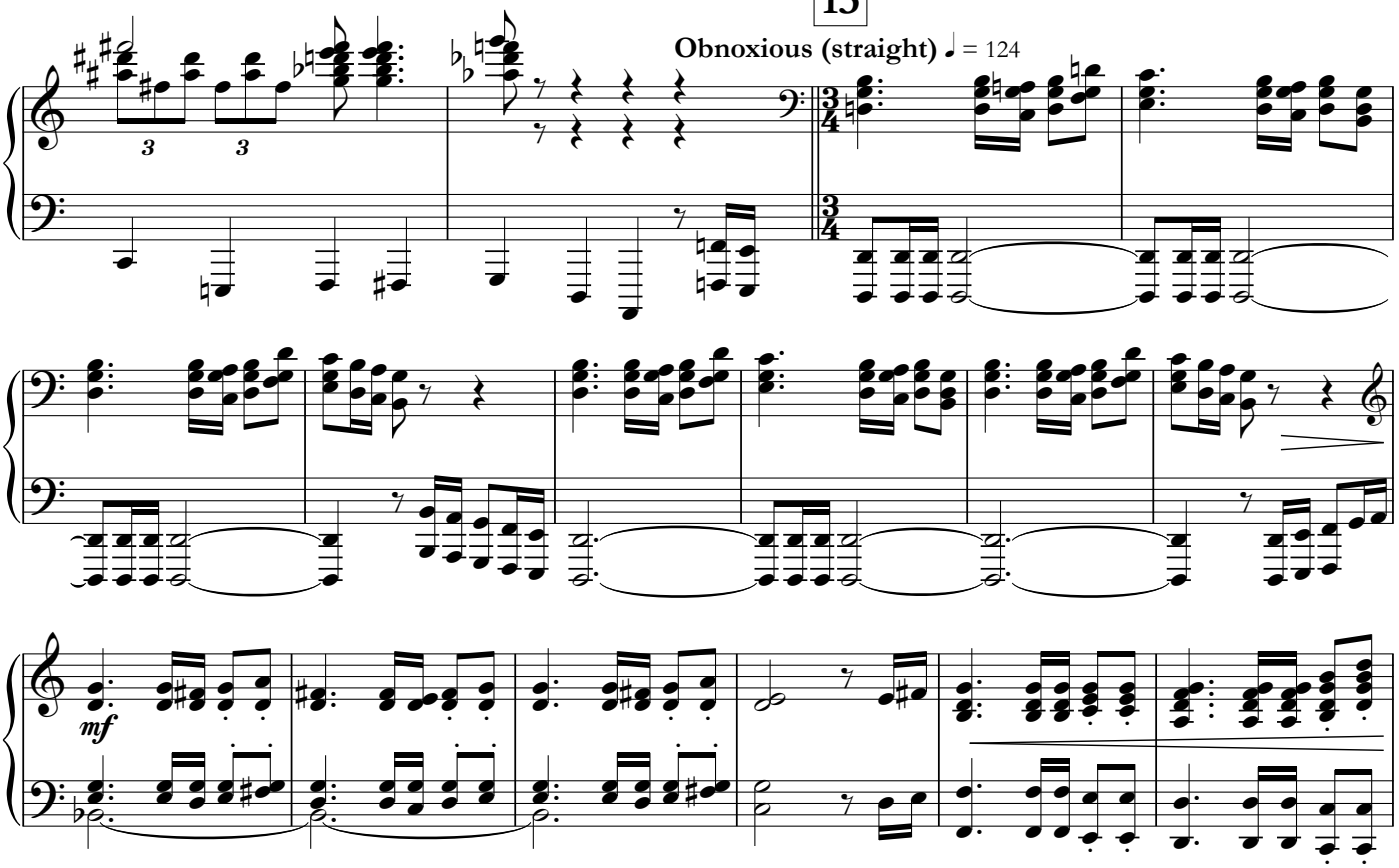

6
Come in from the cold ♩ = 84
p
pp
una corda
p
tre corde
7
Hesitant, uncomfortable ♩ = 92
p
pp
mp
mp
mp
pp
mf
p
mp
mp
p
p
pp
pp
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
Ped.
ppp
mp
pp


8
Careless ♩ = 112
pp
9
With mock seriousness 𝅗𝅥 = 80
mp
10
mf
Pretty vulgar ♩ = 144
f
p
3
Ped.


11
mf
f
12
Obnoxious (swing) ♩ = 188
f

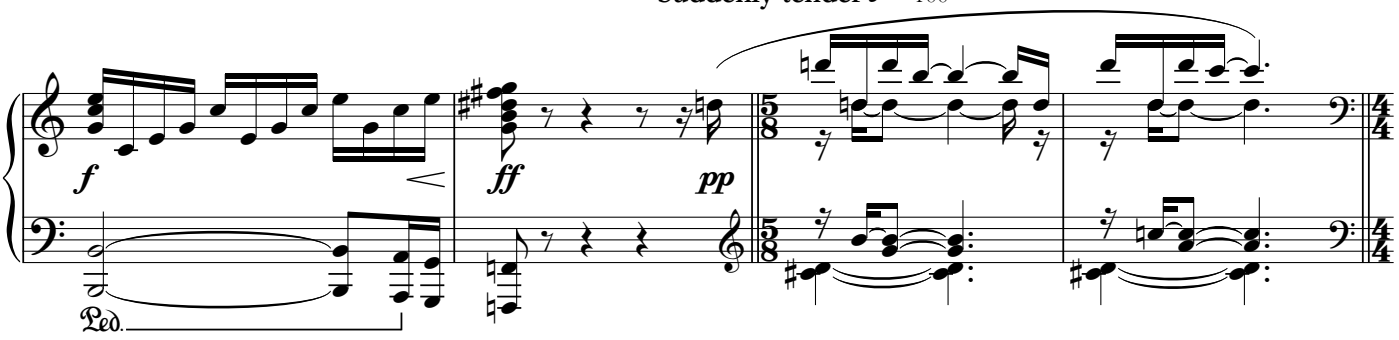
13

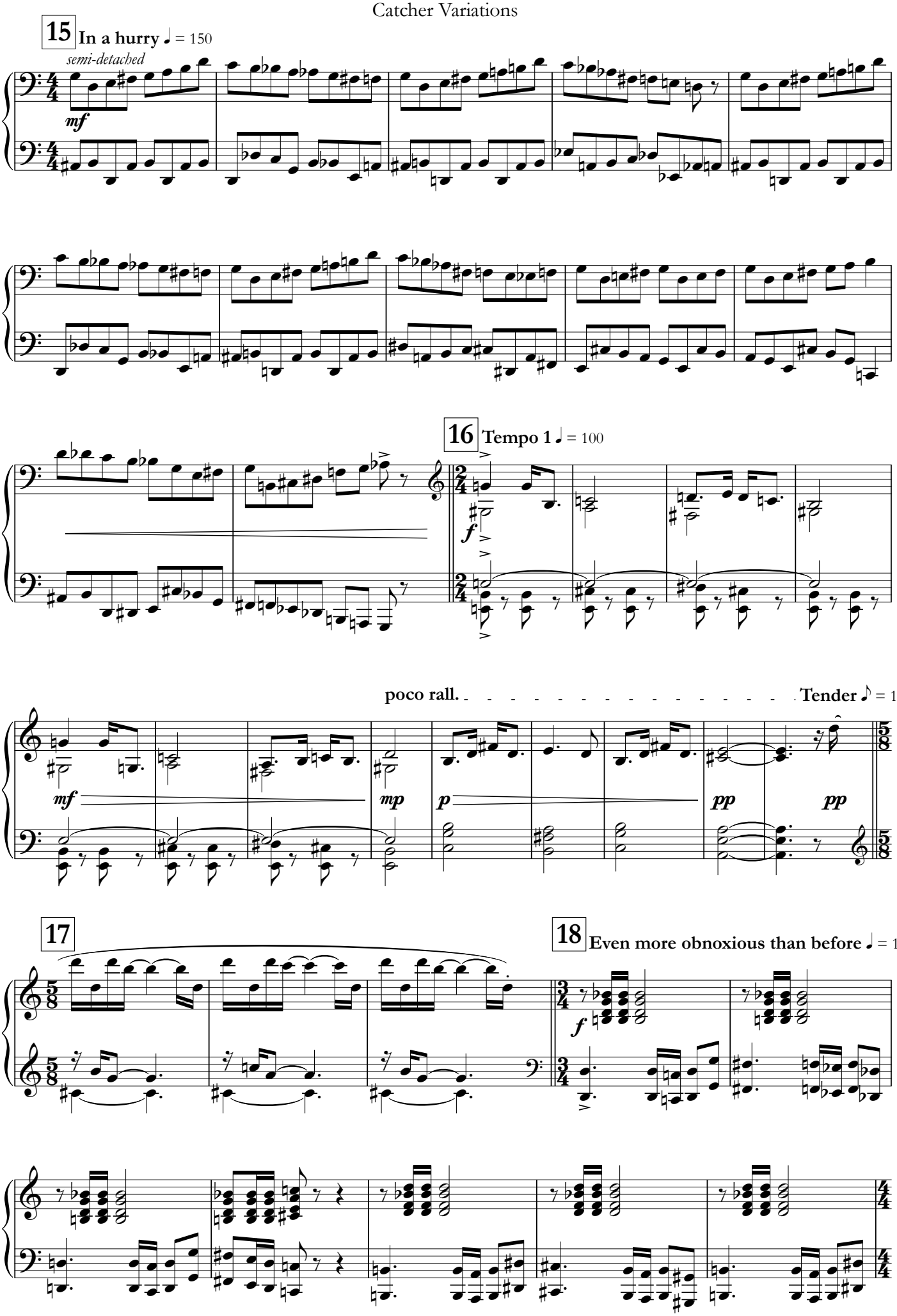
Obnoxious (straight) ♩ = 124

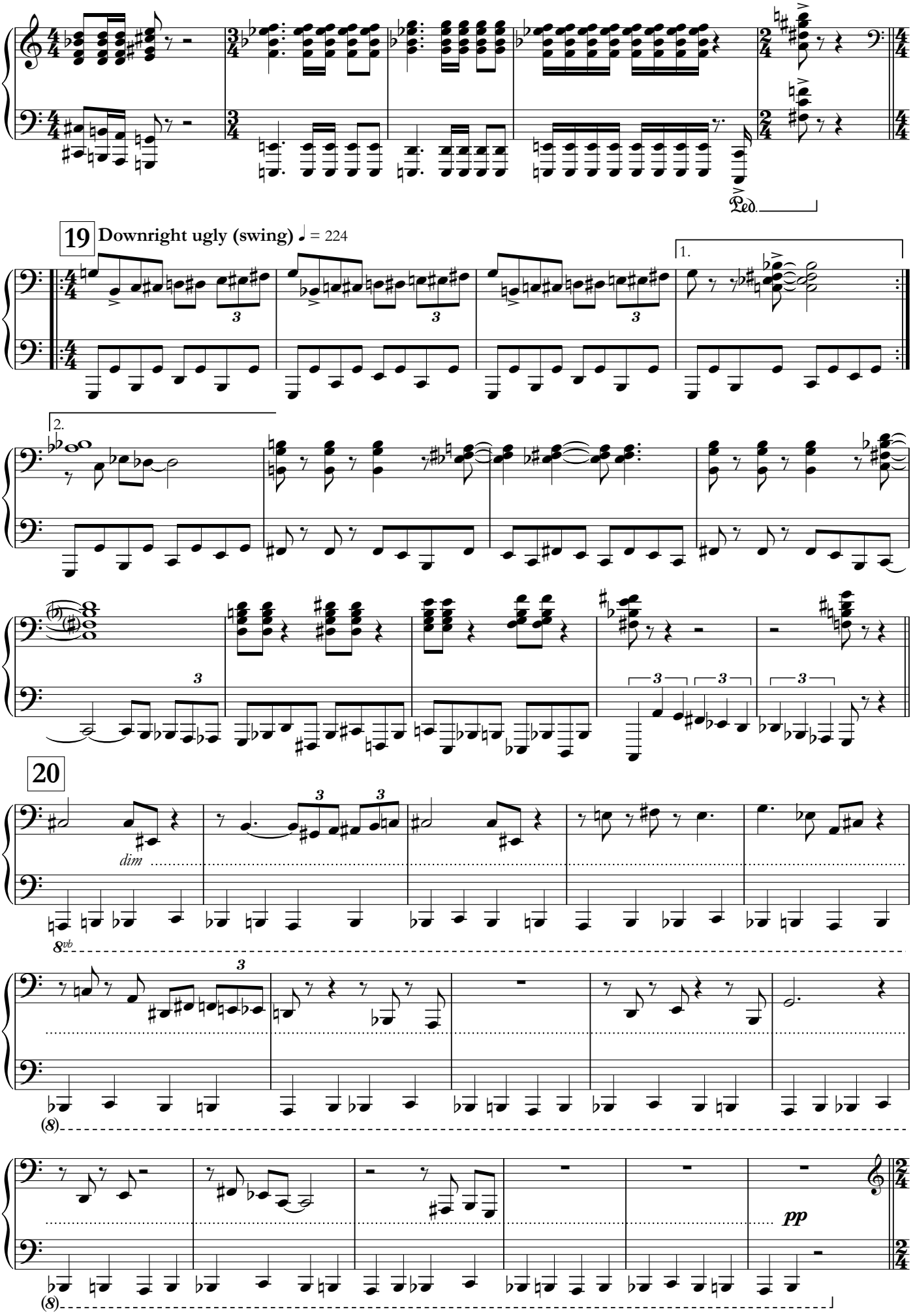


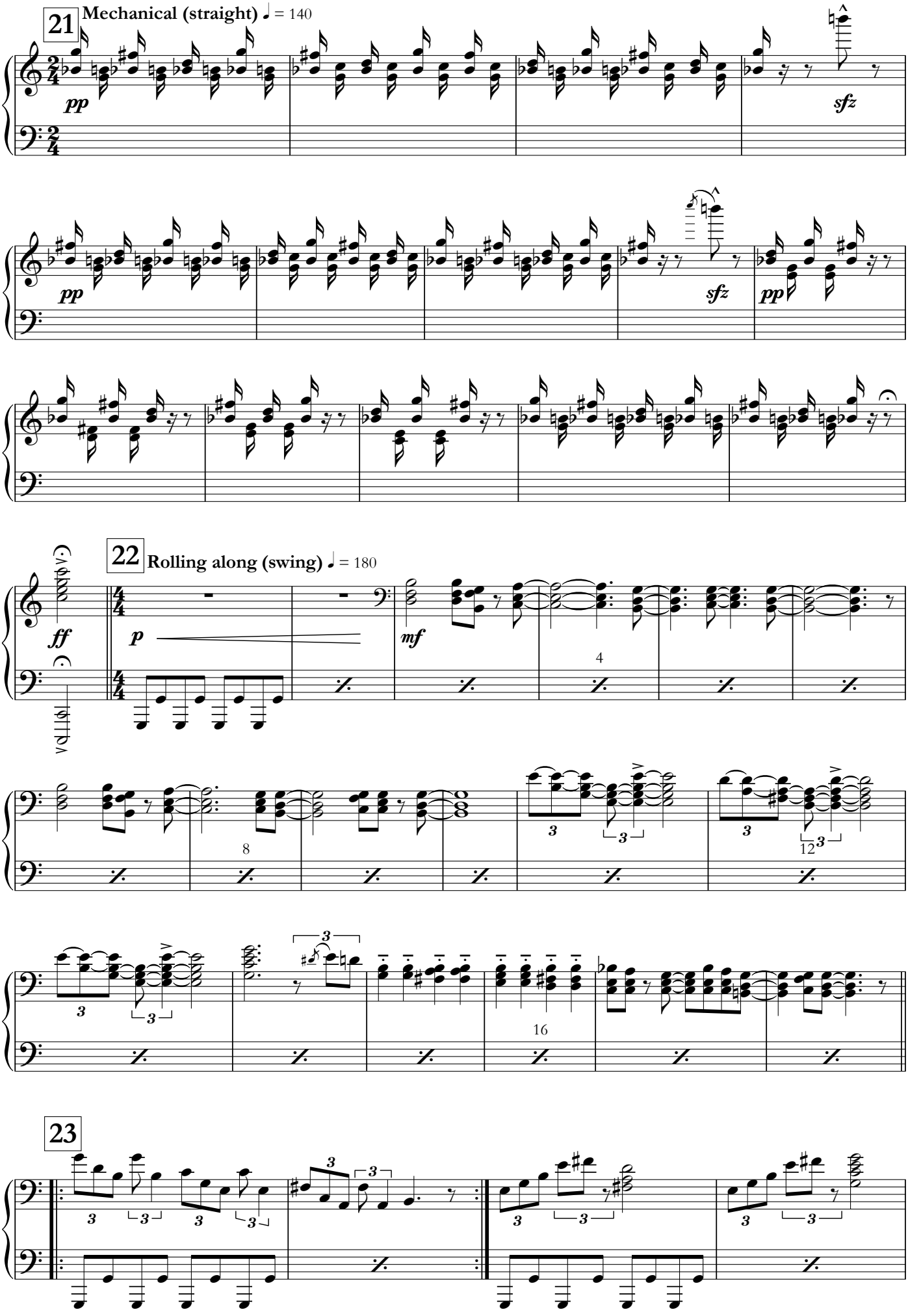
14

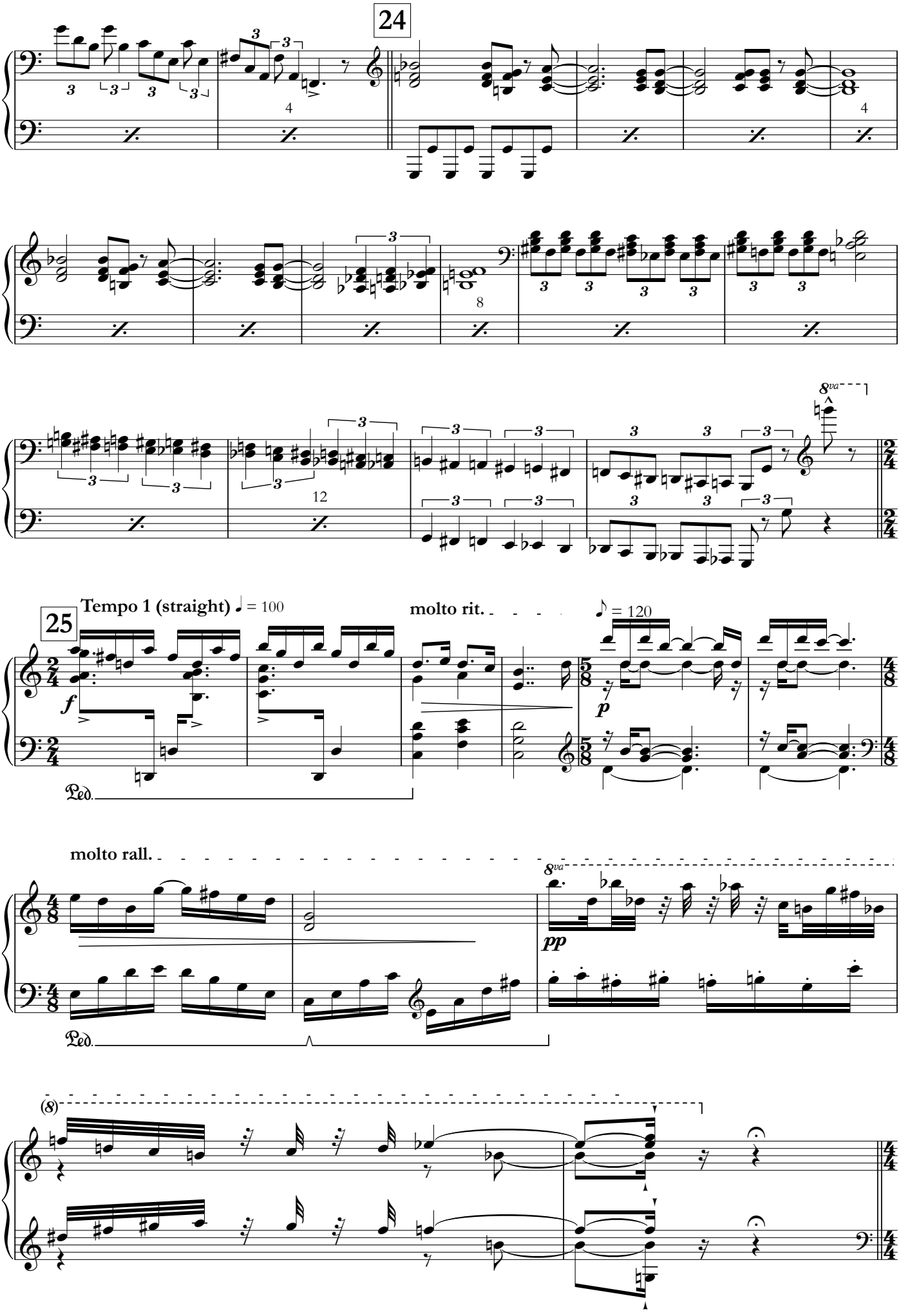
Suddenly tender ♪ = 100

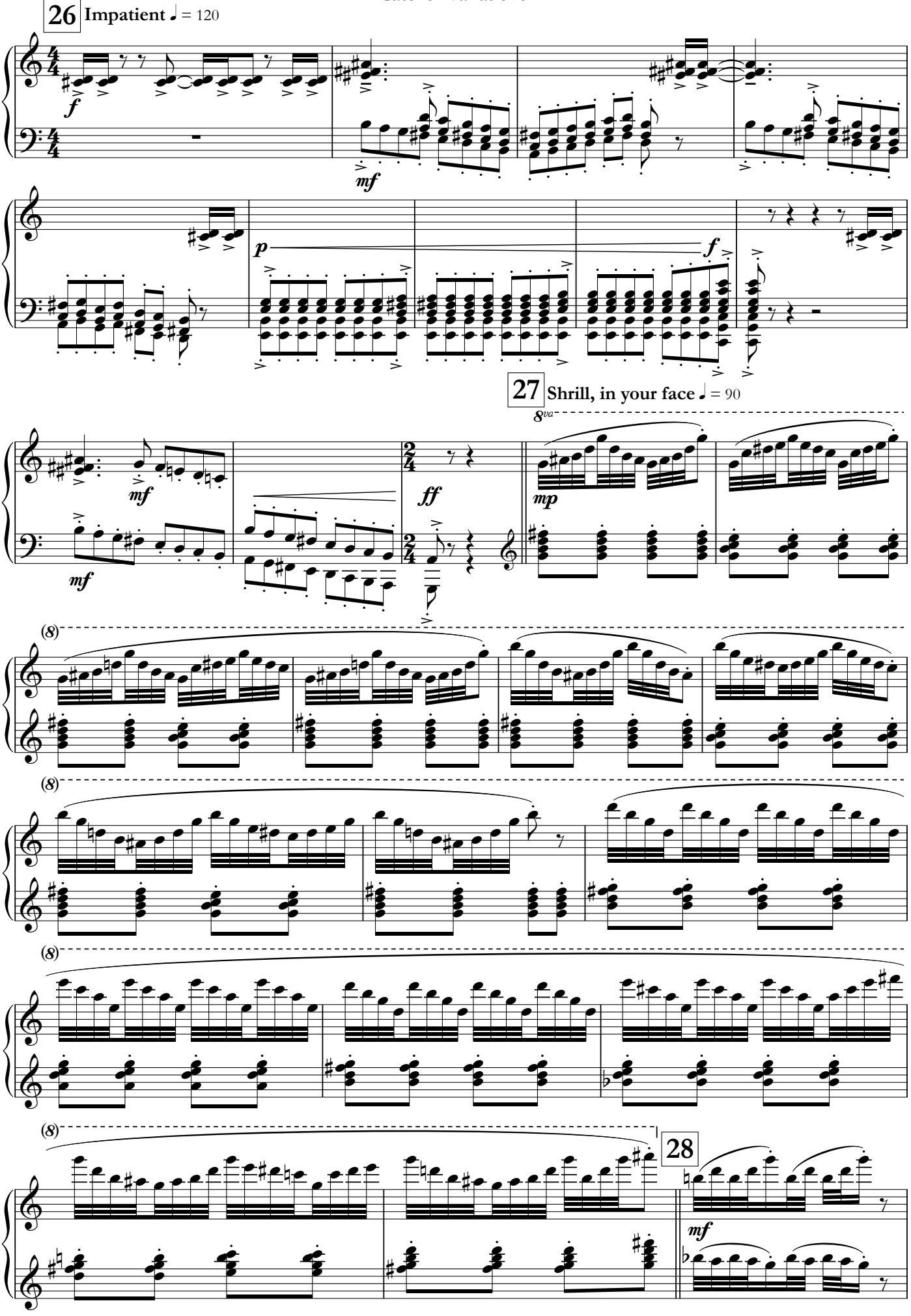


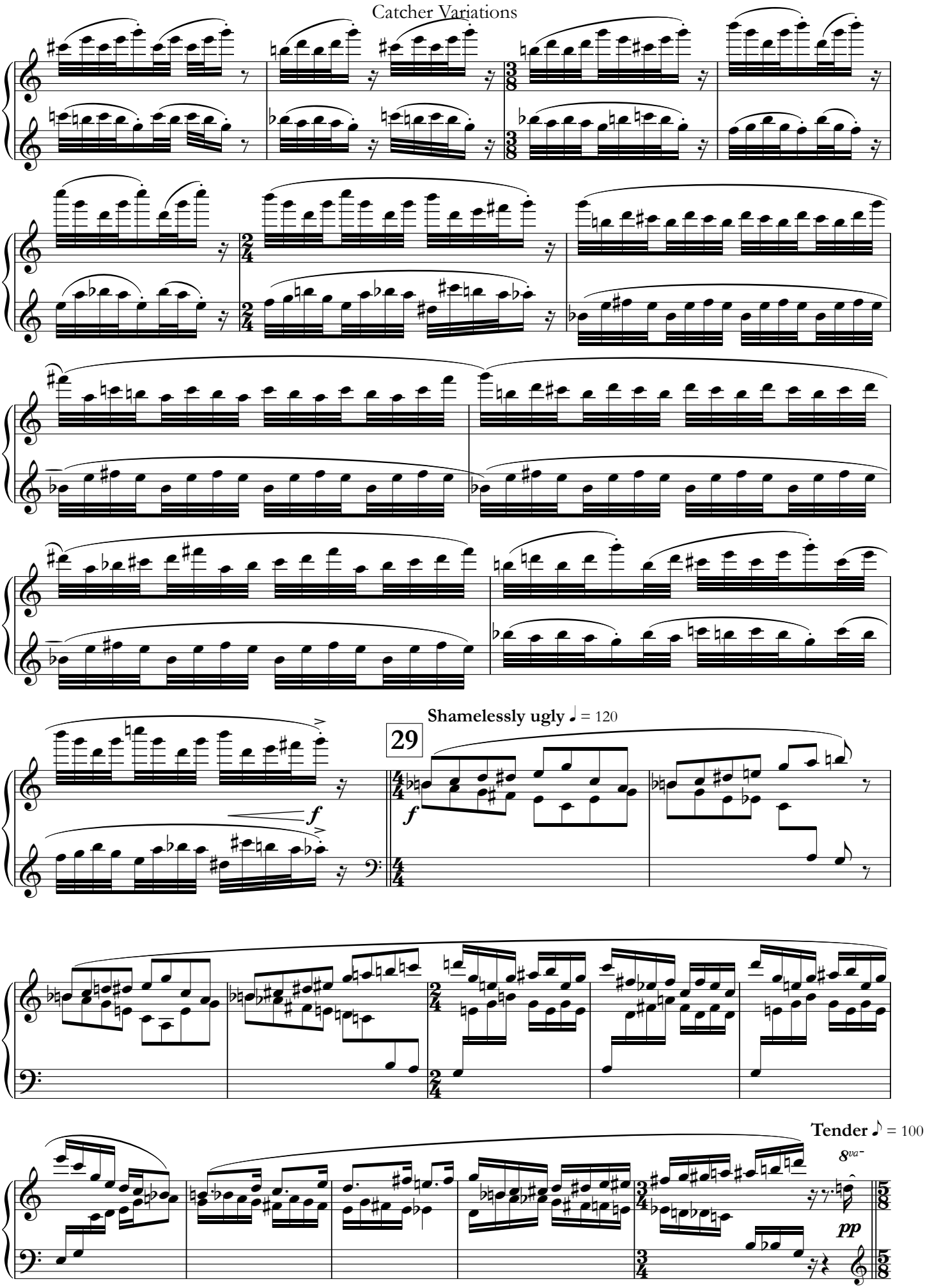

15
In a hurry ♩ = 150
semi-detached
mf
16
Tempo 1 ♩ = 100
f
poco rall.
Tender ♪ = 100
mf
mp
p
pp
pp
17
18
Even more obnoxious than before ♩ = 136
f

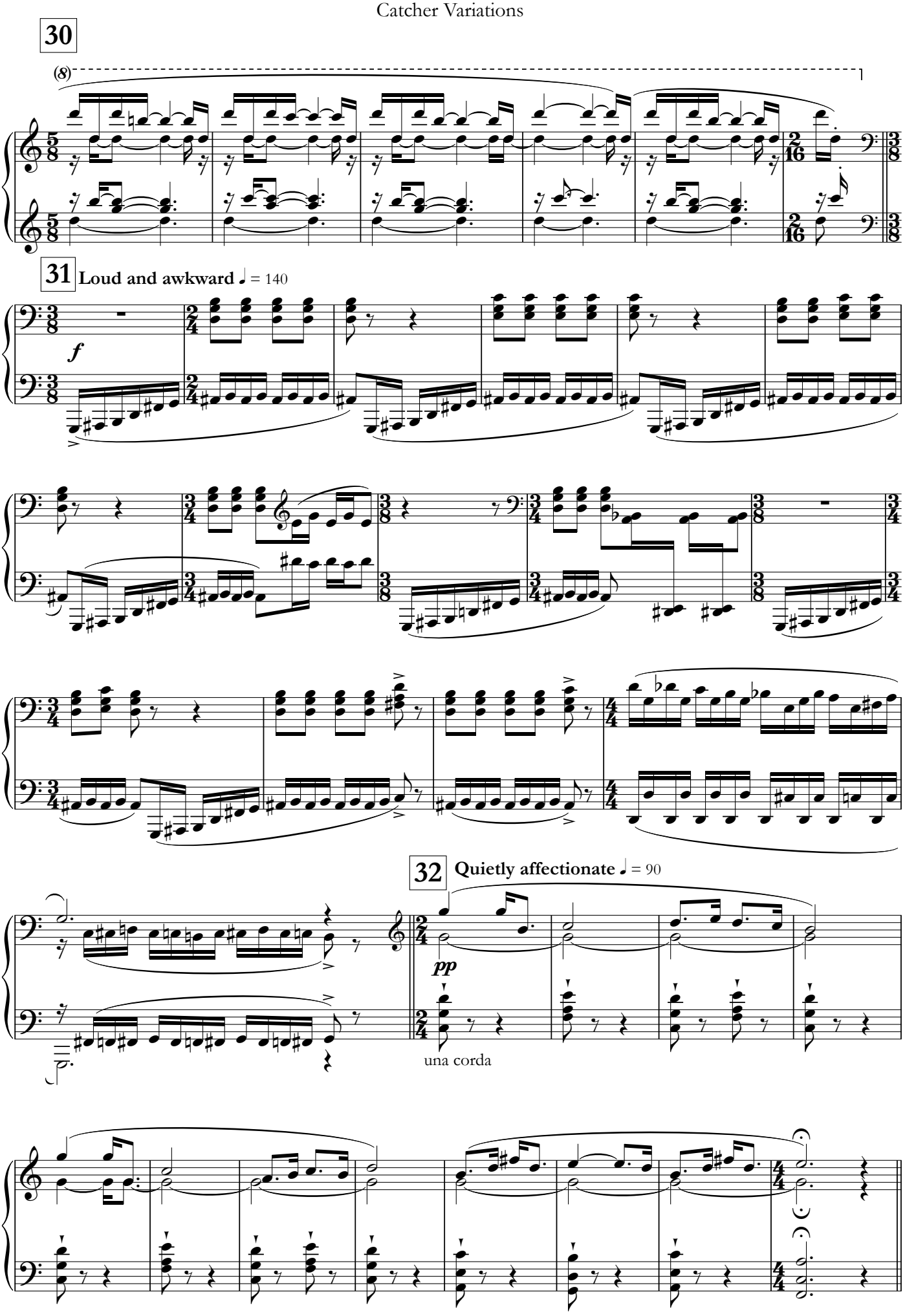

Ped.
19
Downright ugly (swing) ♩ = 224
1.
2.
20
dim
8vb
(8)
pp
(8)


21
Mechanical (straight) ♩ = 140
pp
sfz
22
Rolling along (swing) ♩ = 180
ff
p
mf
4
8
12
16
23


24
25
Tempo 1 (straight) ♩ = 100
molto rit.
♪ = 120
molto rall.
Ped.
8va


26
Impatient ♩ = 120
27
Shrill, in your face ♩ = 90
28


29
Shamelessly ugly ♩ = 120
f
Tender ♪ = 100
8va
pp


30
(8)
31
Loud and awkward ♩ = 140
f
32
Quietly affectionate ♩ = 90
pp
una corda

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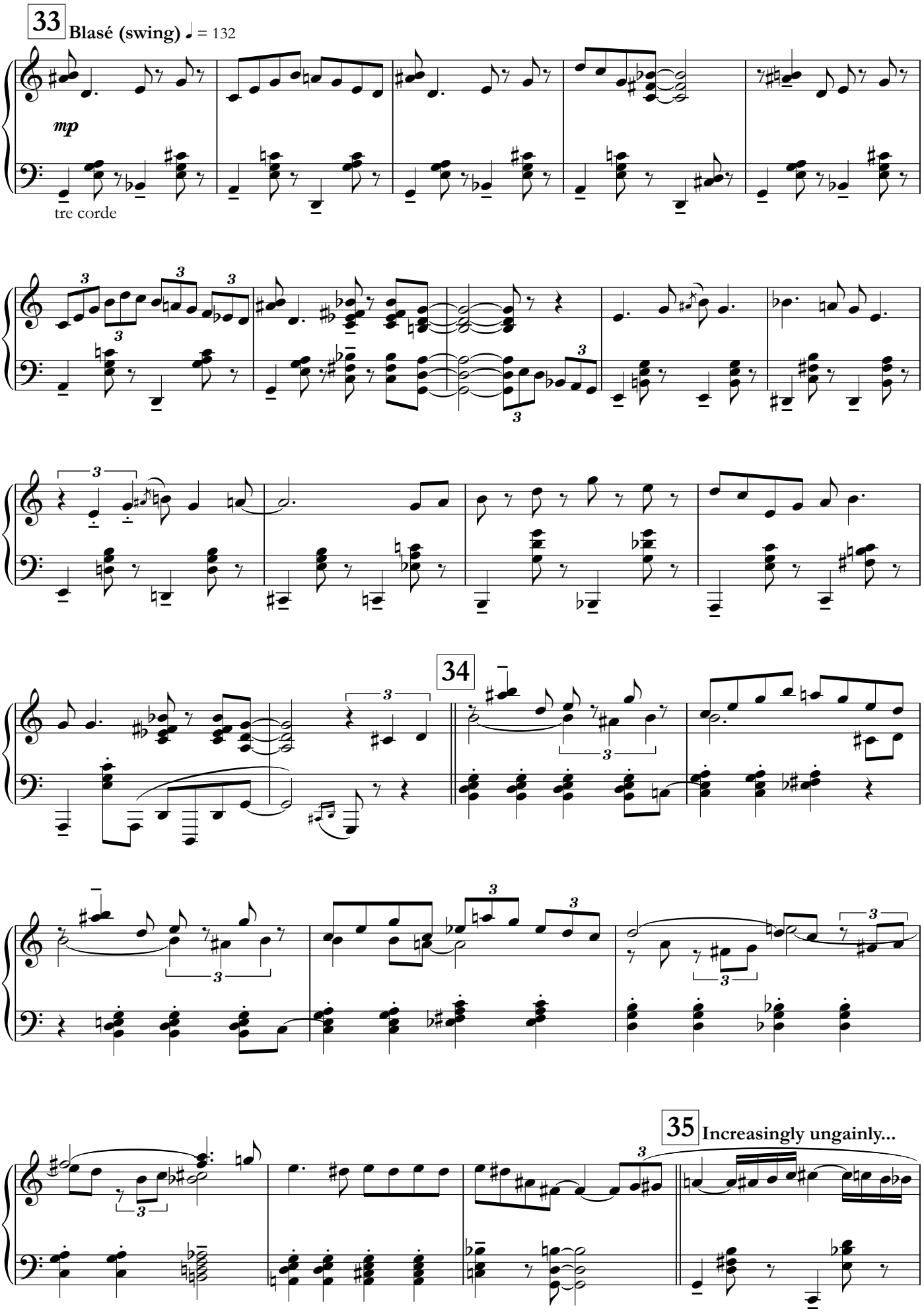
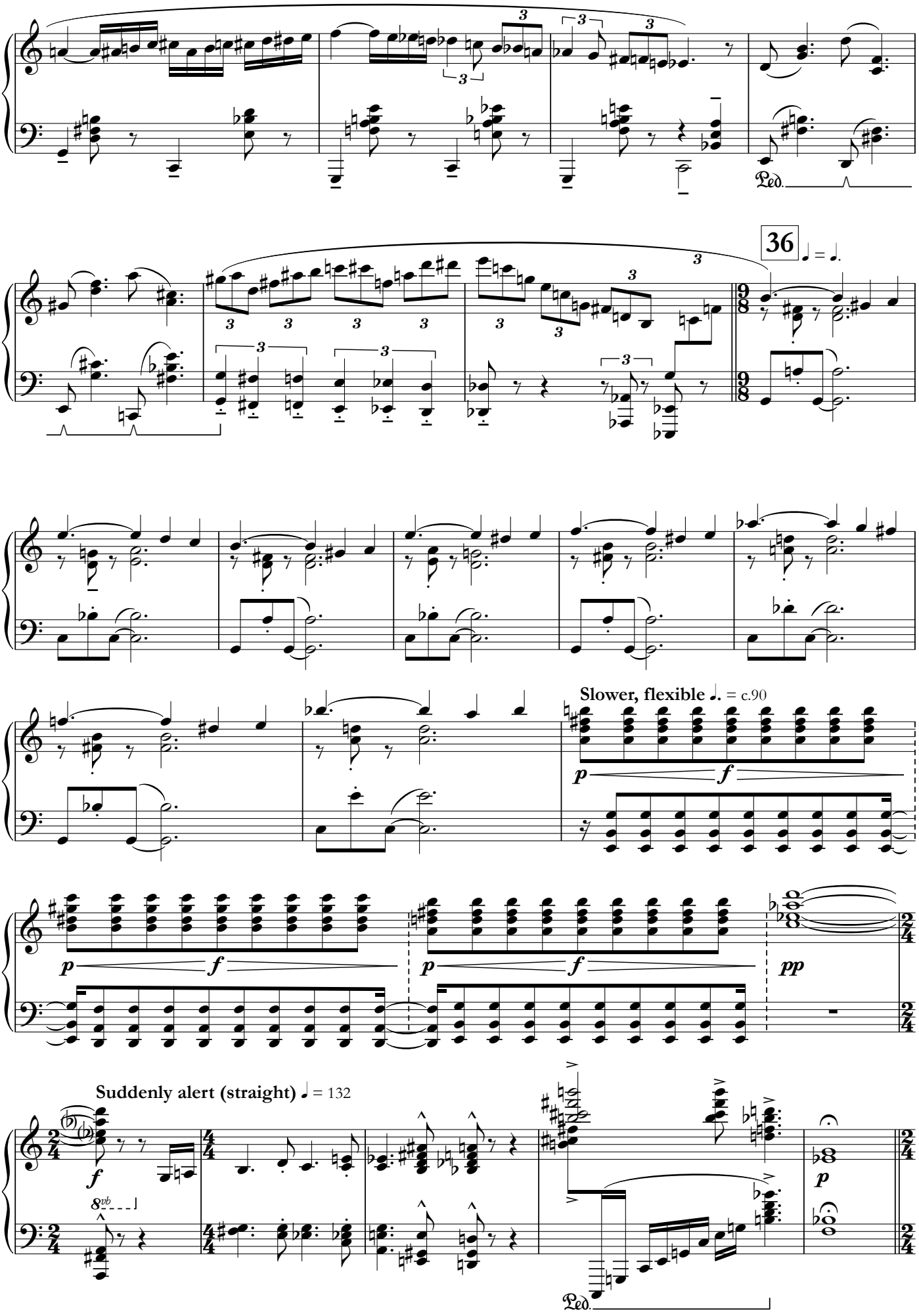
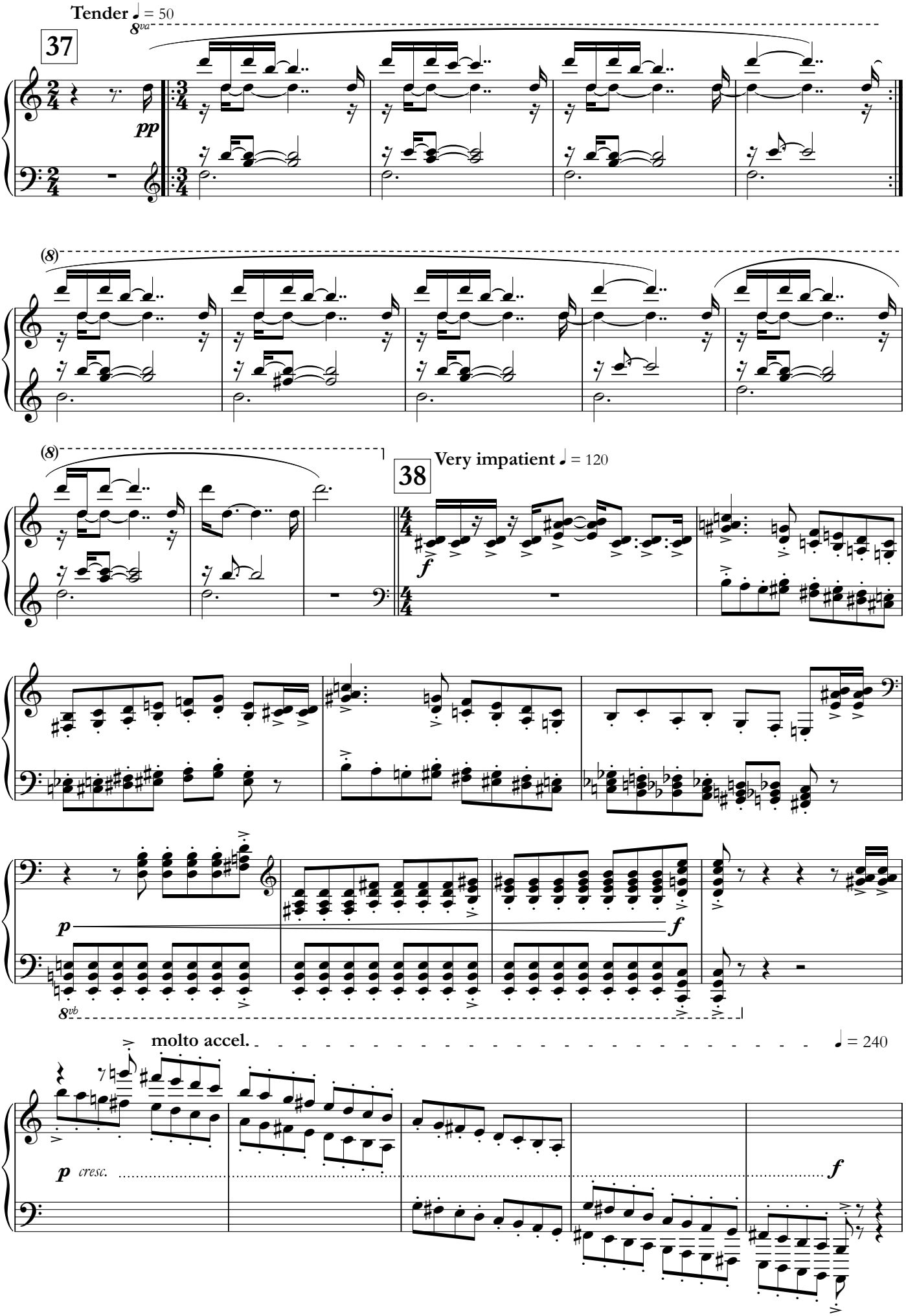

33
Blasé (swing) ♩ = 132
mp
tre corde
34
35
Increasingly ungainly...


36
Slower, flexible
Suddenly alert (straight)
Ped.


Tender ♩ = 50
8va
37
pp
(8)
(8)
38
Very impatient ♩ = 120
f
p
f
8vb
molto accel.
♩ = 240
p cresc.
f

Catcher Variations

Pretty, but show-offy (very free) ♩ = c.80

39

mp

Ped.

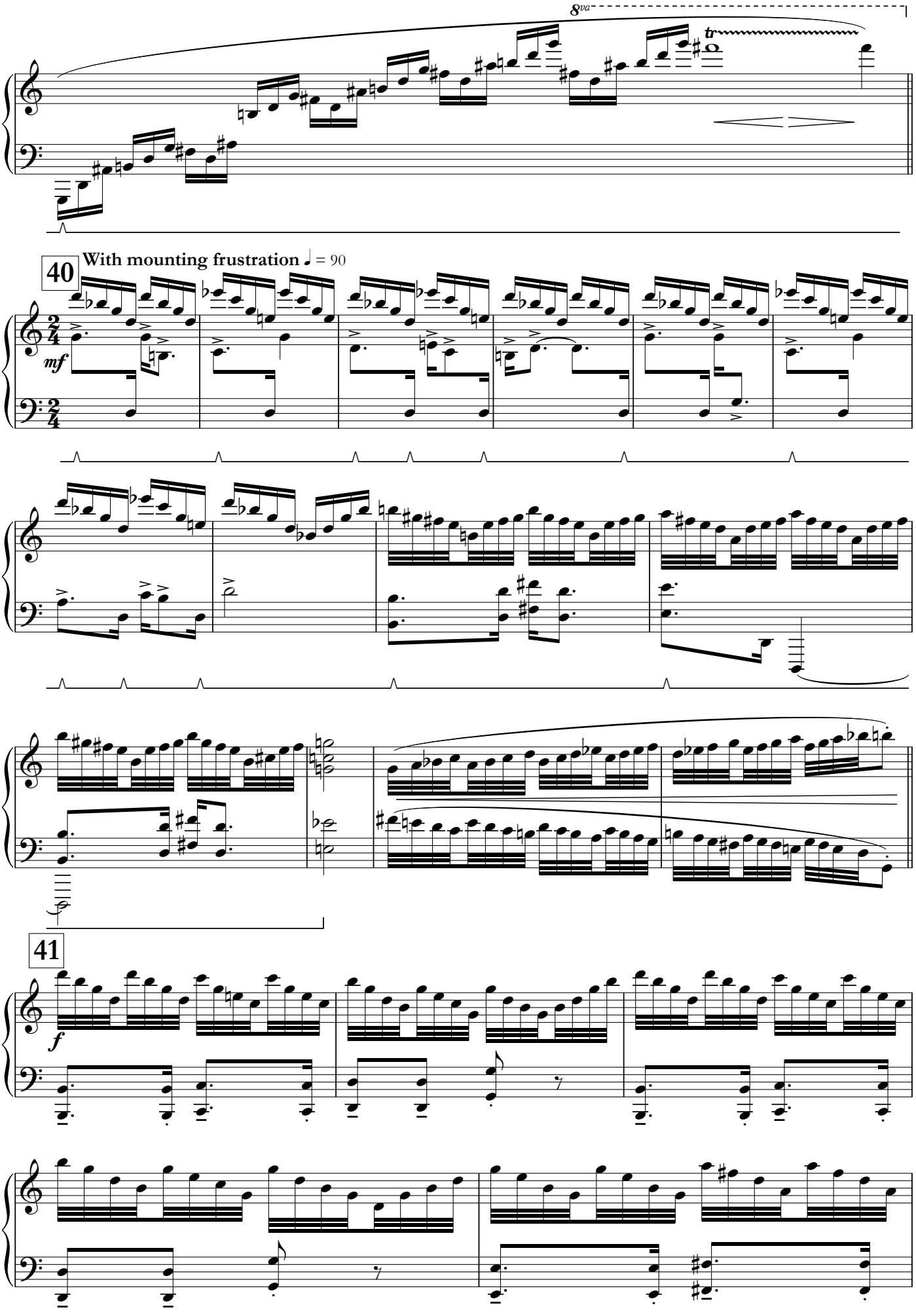
Ped.

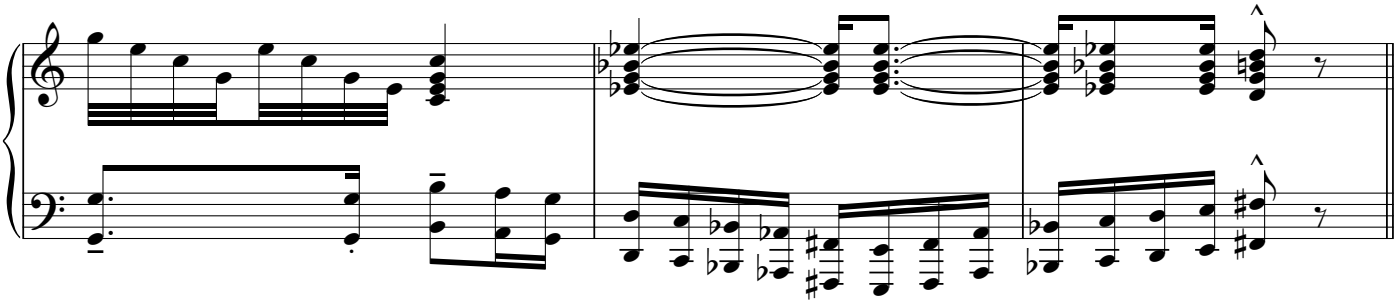
accel. rit.

accel.

A tempo ♩ = c.80

Ped.


8va
tr
40
With mounting frustration ♩ = 90
mf
41
f



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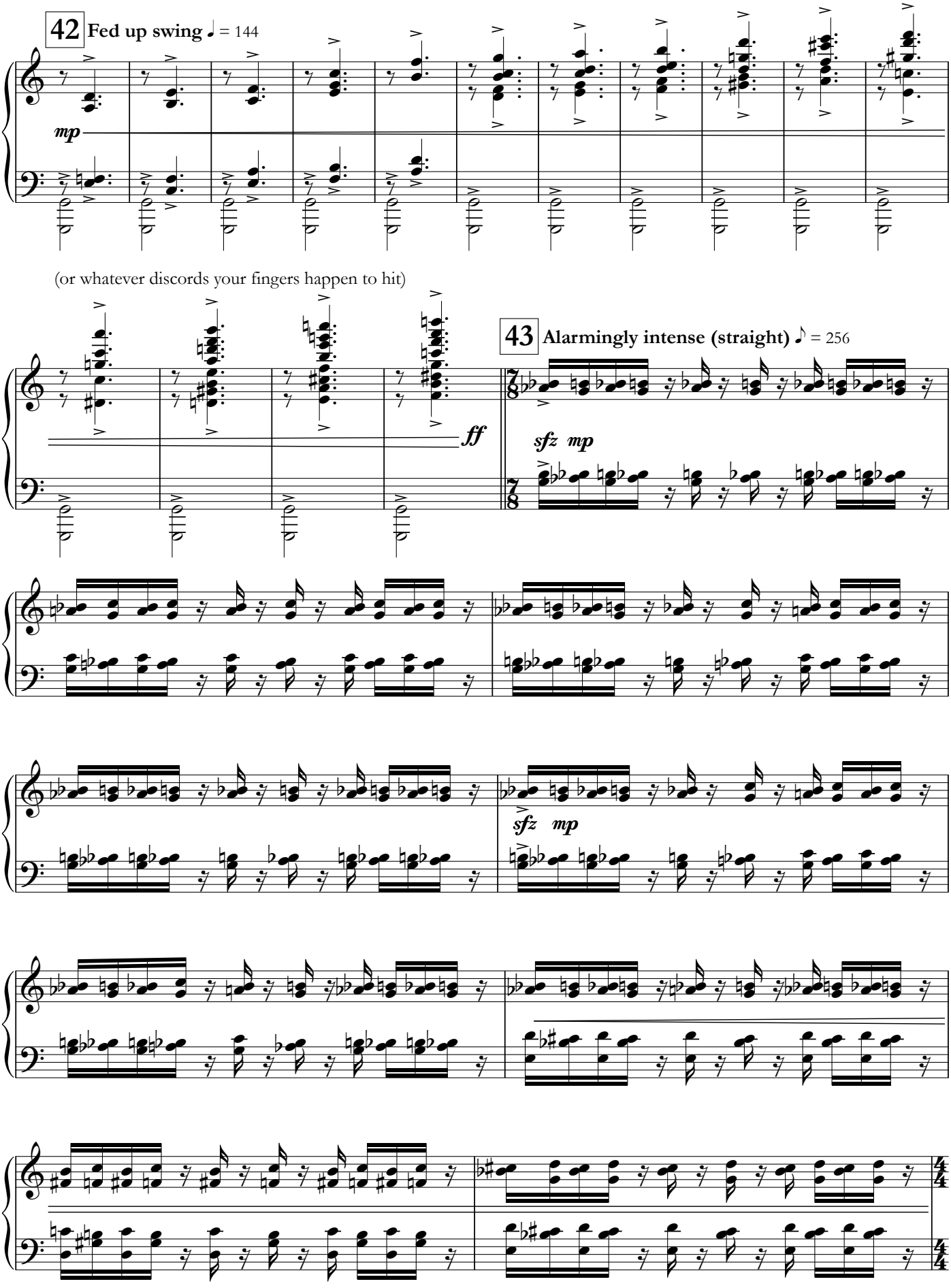
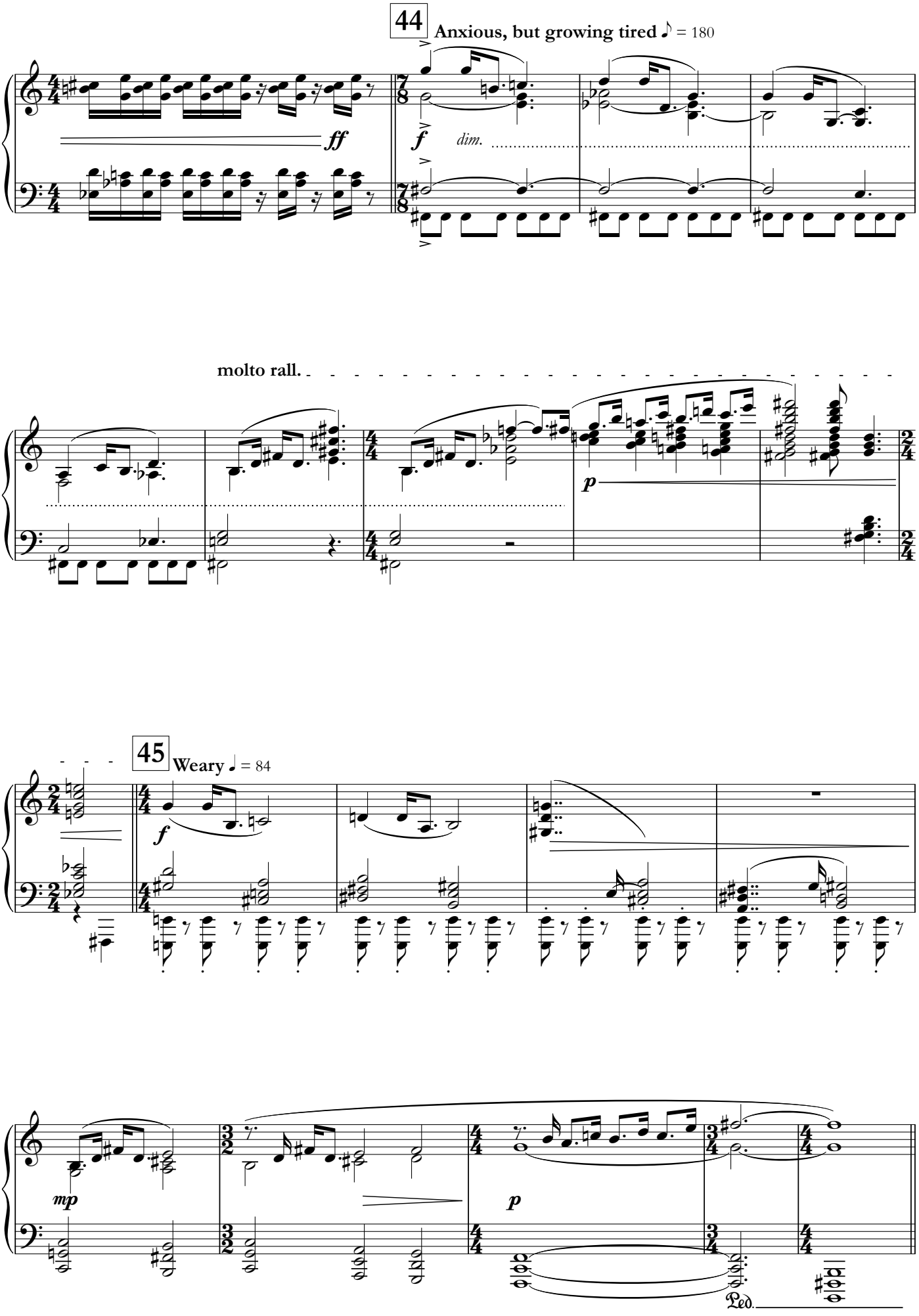
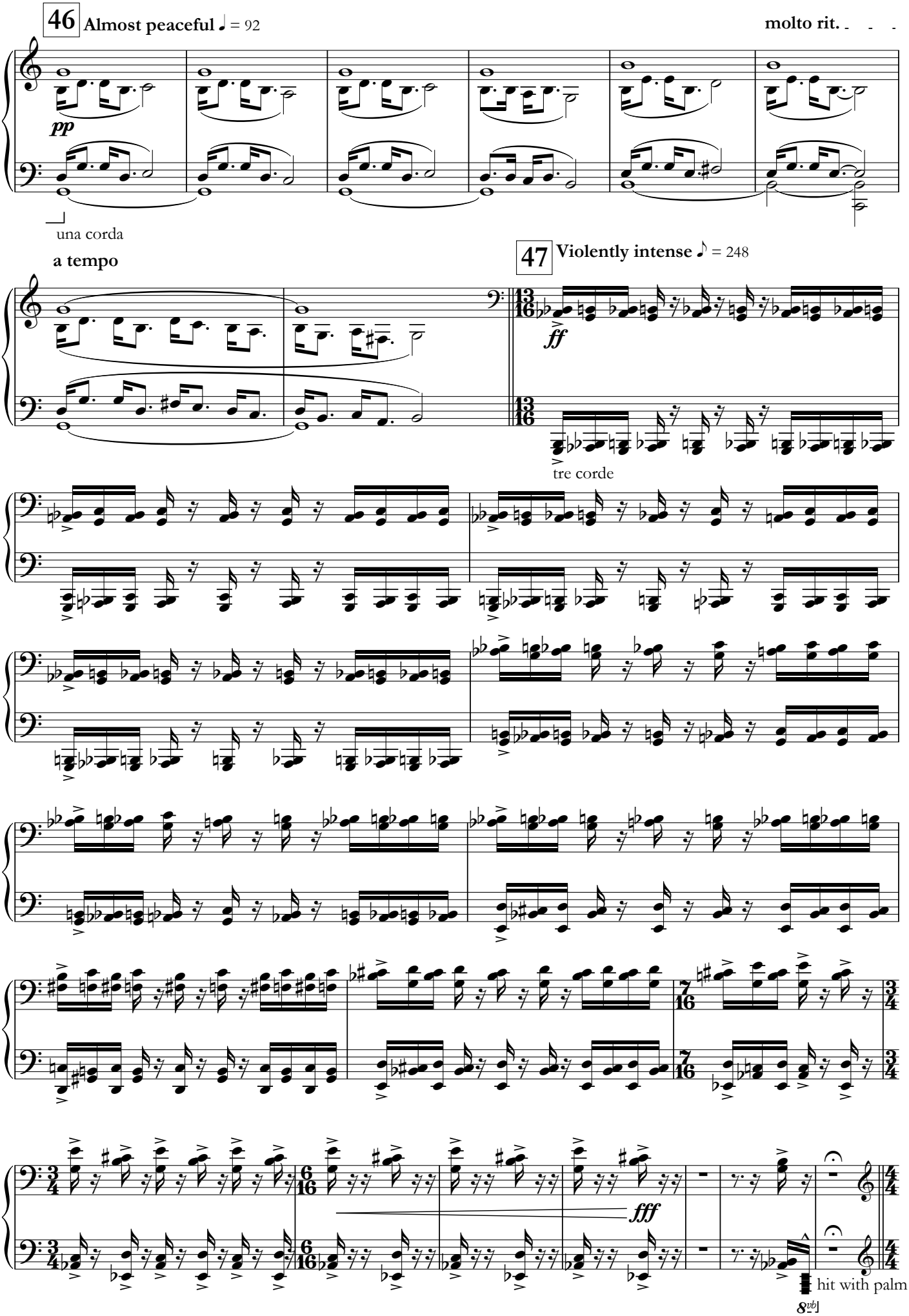
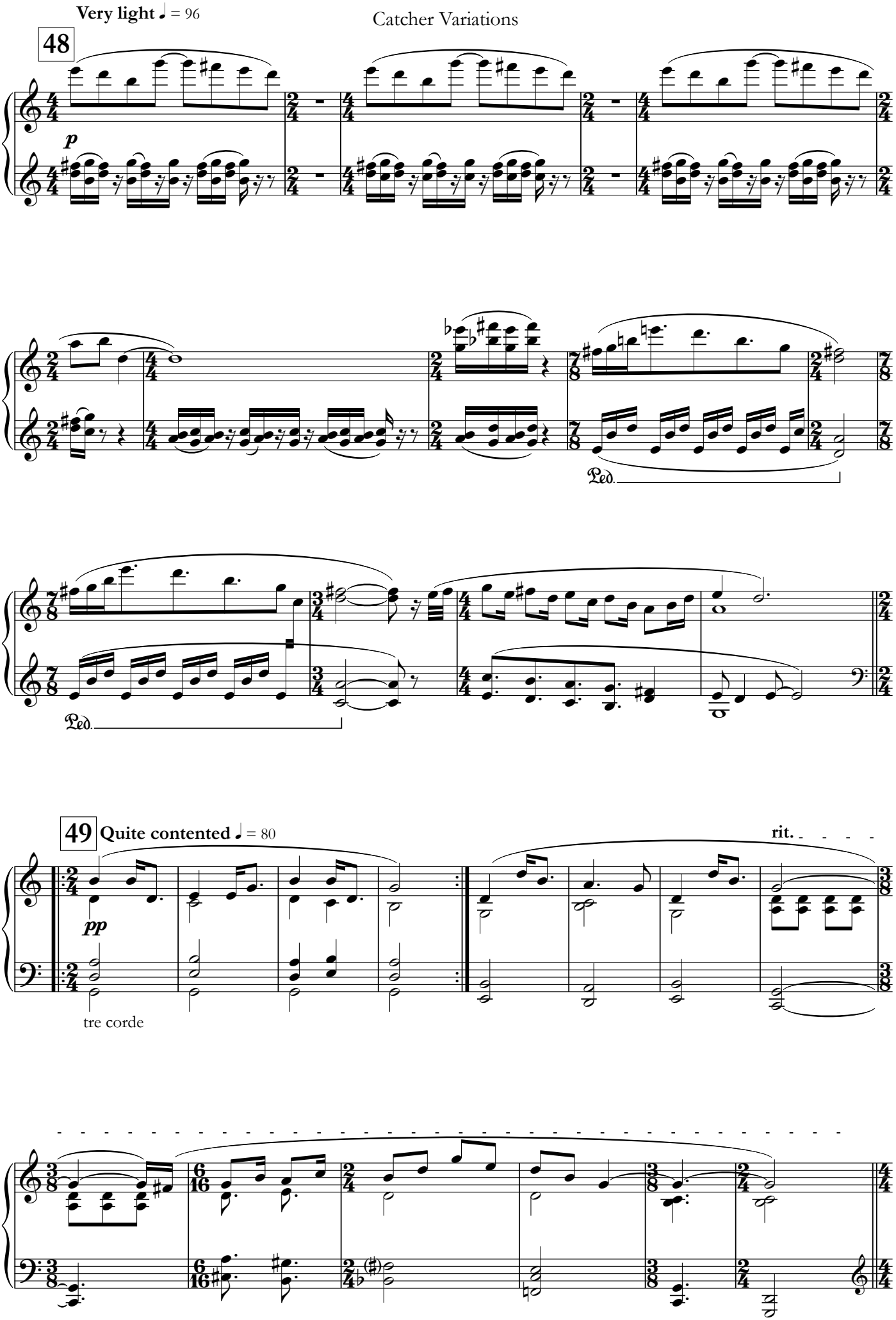
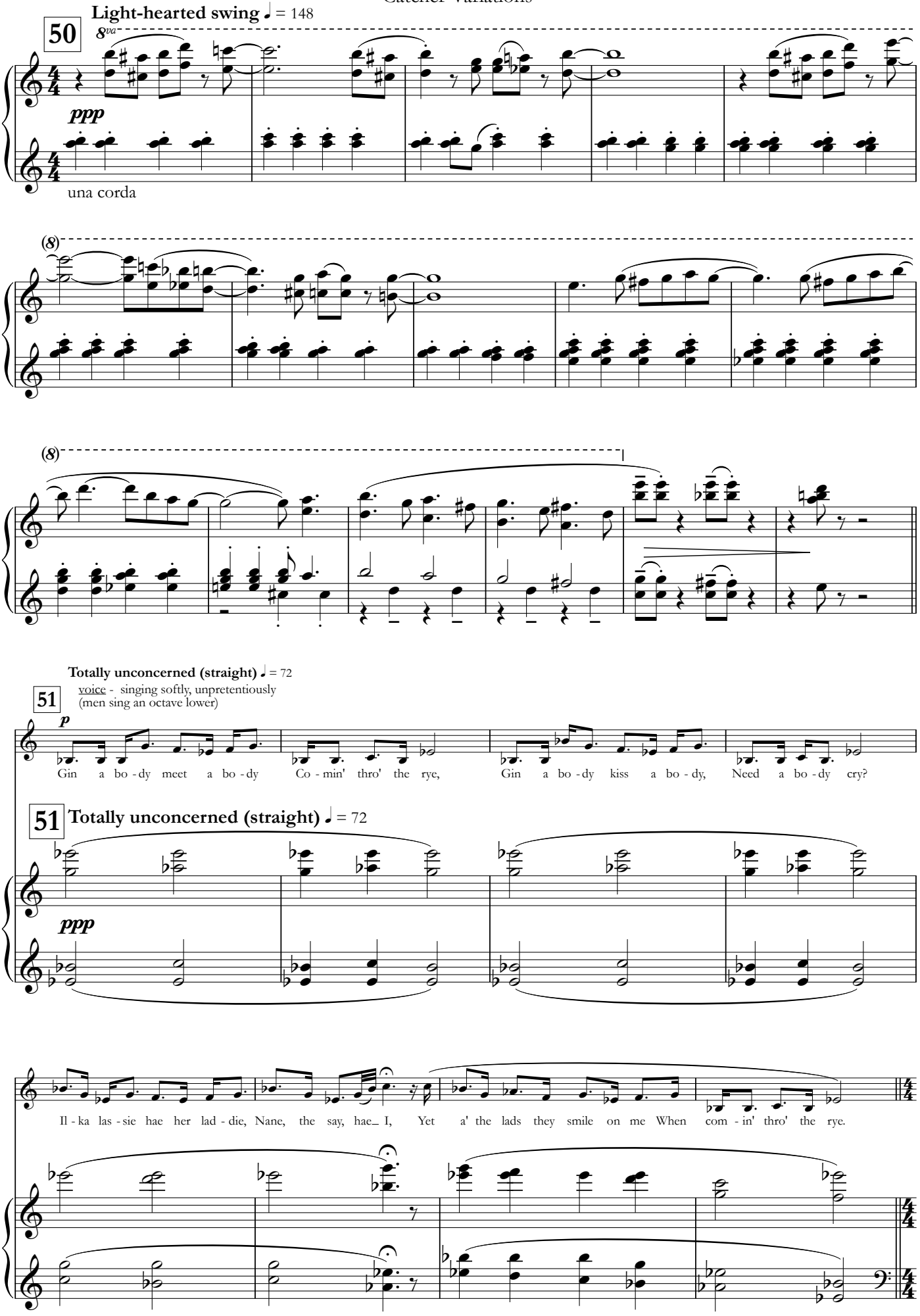
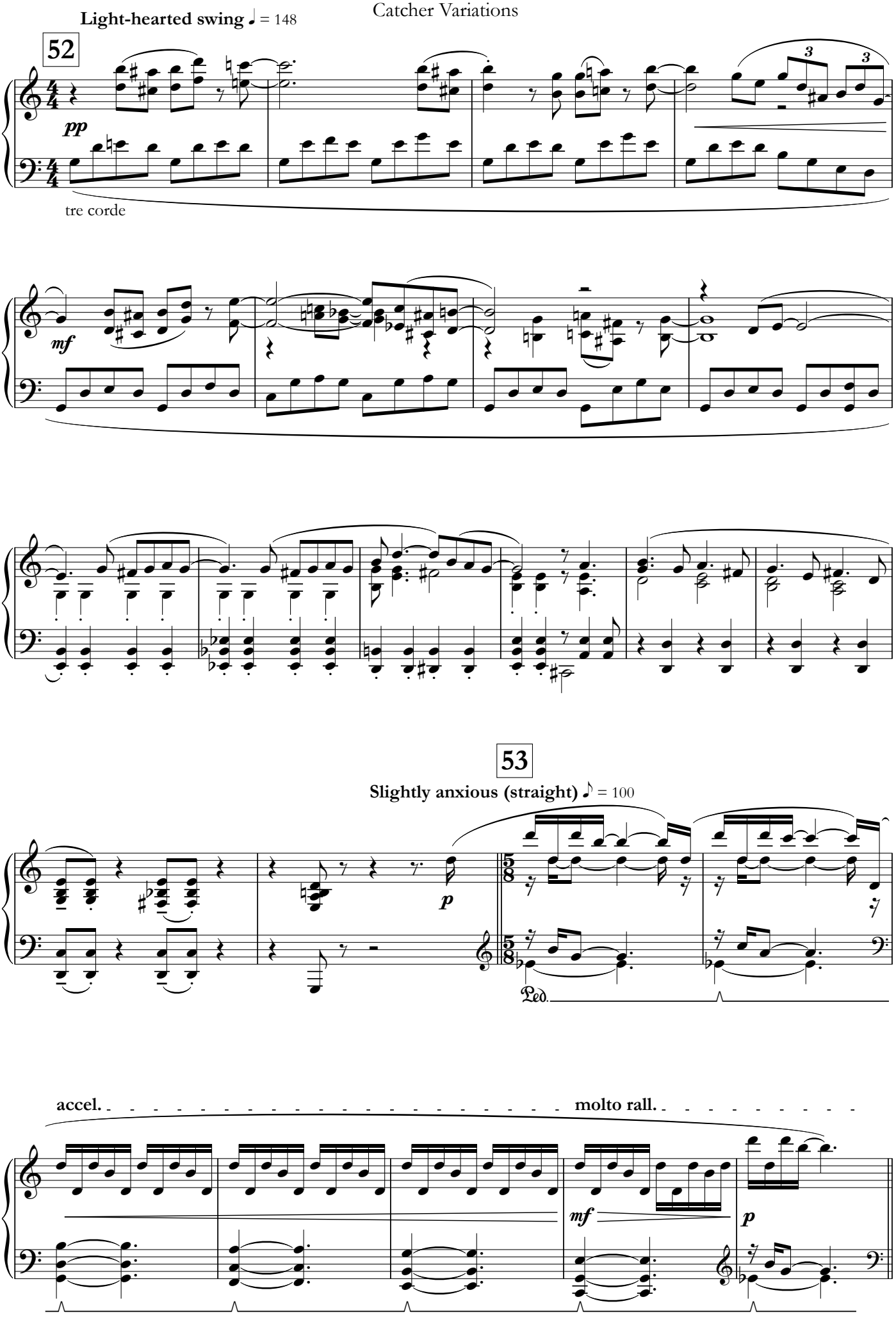

42 Fed up swing ♩ = 144
mp
(or whatever discords your fingers happen to hit)
ff
43 Alarmingly intense (straight) ♪ = 256
sfz mp
sfz mp

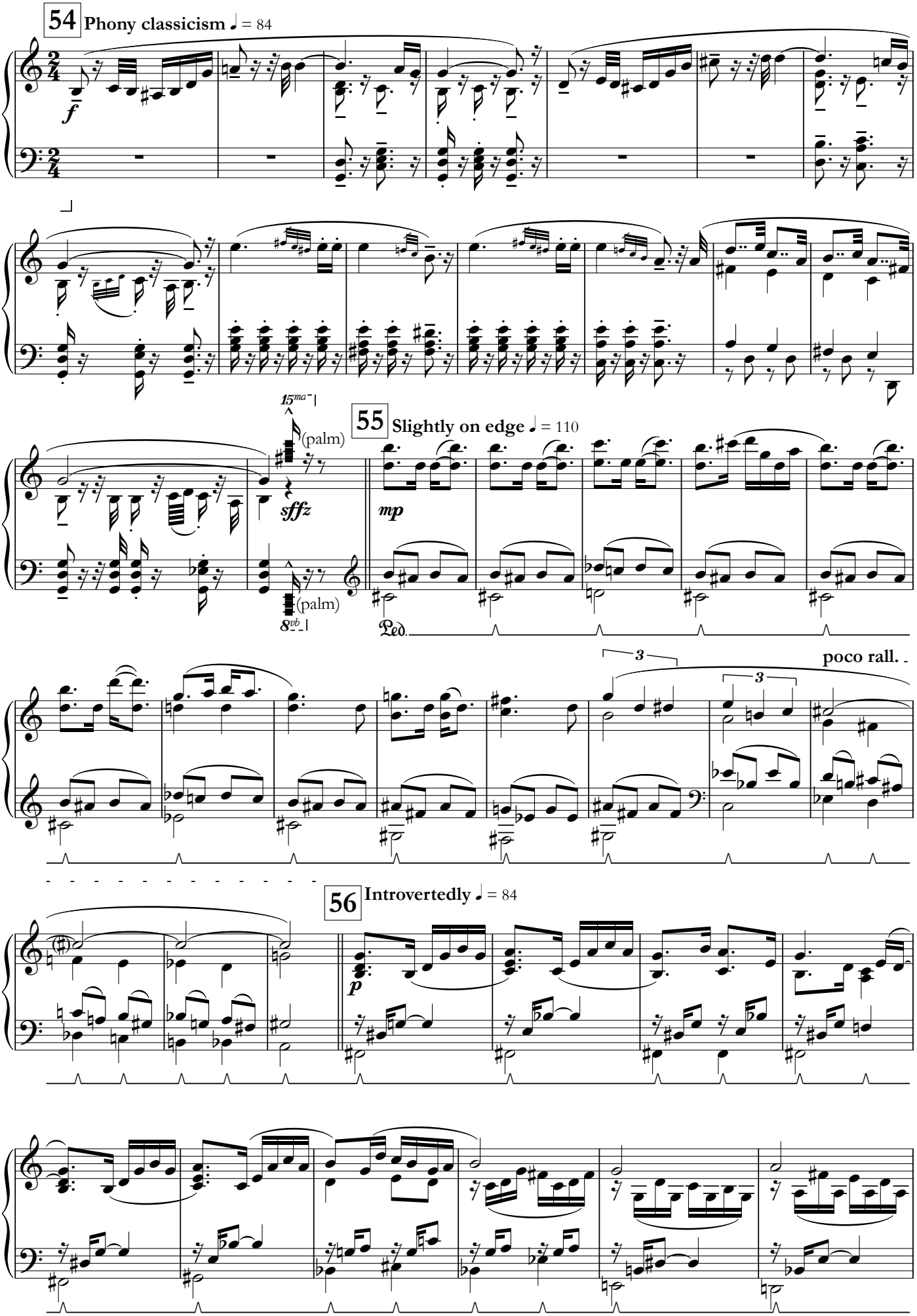

44
Anxious, but growing tired ♪ = 180
ff
f
dim.
molto rall.
p
45
Weary ♩ = 84
f
mp
p
Ped.

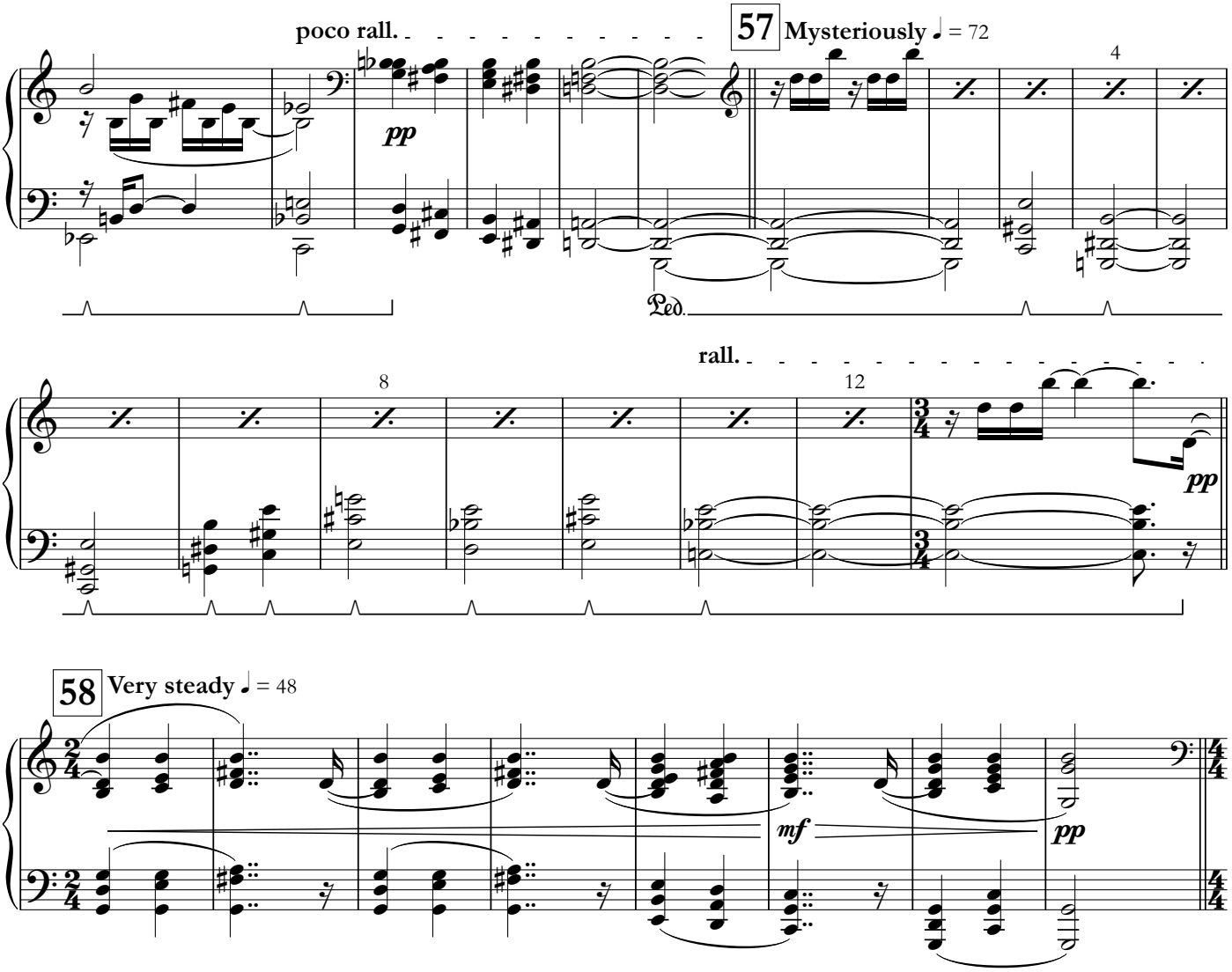

46
Almost peaceful ♩ = 92
molto rit.
pp
una corda
a tempo
47
Violently intense ♪ = 248
ff
tre corde
fff
hit with palm


Very light ♩ = 96
48
p
Ped.
Ped.
49
Quite contented ♩ = 80
pp
tre corde
rit.


Light-hearted swing ♩ = 148
50
8va
ppp
una corda
(8)
(8)
Totally unconcerned (straight) ♩ = 72
51
voice - singing softly, unpretentiously
(men sing an octave lower)
p
Gin a bo - dy meet a bo - dy Co - min' thro' the rye, Gin a bo - dy kiss a bo - dy, Need a bo - dy cry?
51 Totally unconcerned (straight) ♩ = 72
ppp
Il - ka las - sie hae her lad - die, Nane, the say, hae_ I, Yet a' the lads they smile on me When com - in' thro' the rye.


Light-hearted swing ♩ = 148
52
pp
tre corde
mf
53
Slightly anxious (straight) ♪ = 100
p
Ped.
accel.
molto rall.
mf
p


54 Phony classicism ♩ = 84
f
15ma
(palm)
sffz
55 Slightly on edge ♩ = 110
mp
(palm)
8vb
Ped.
3
3
poco rall.
56 Introvertedly ♩ = 84
p



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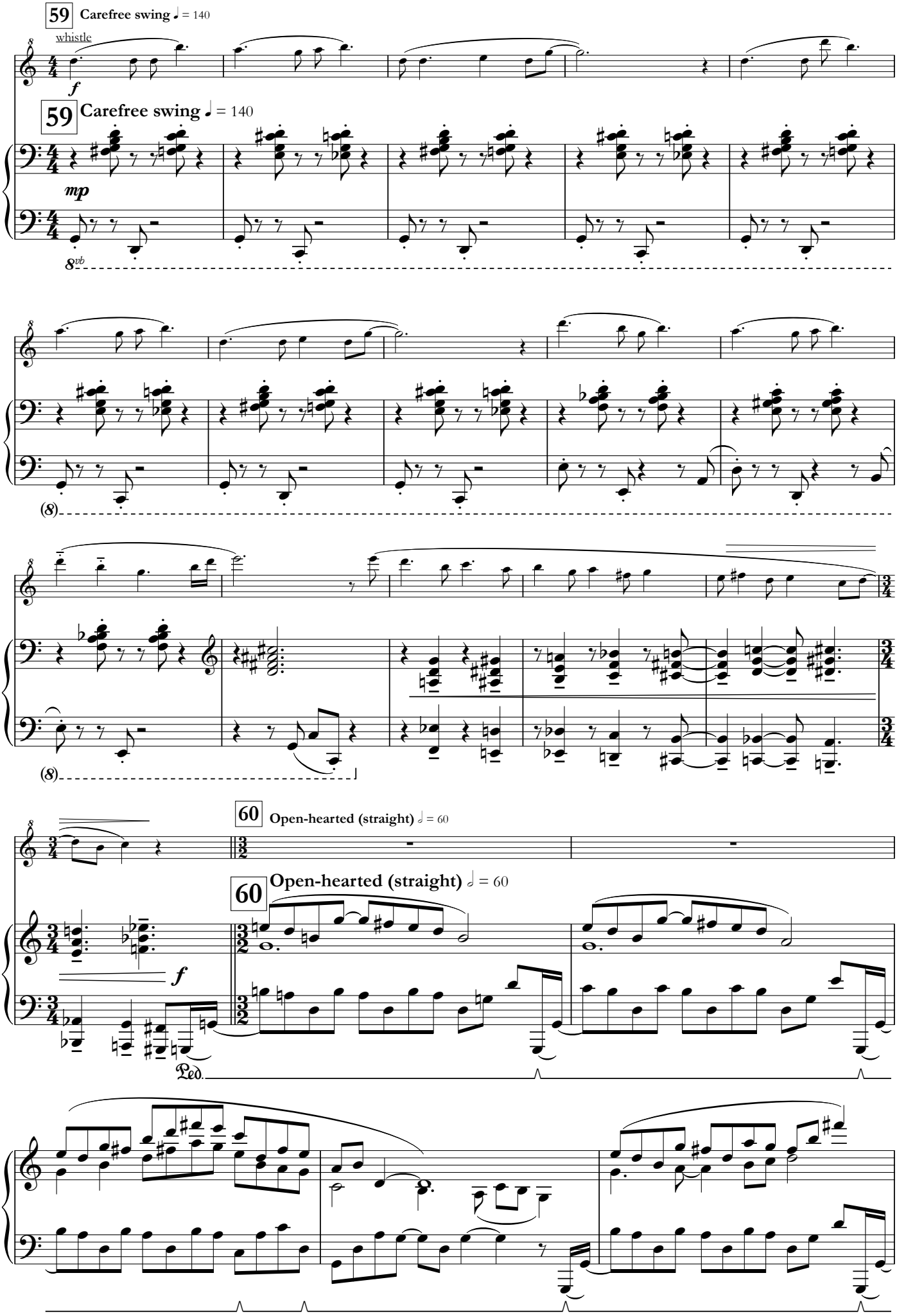
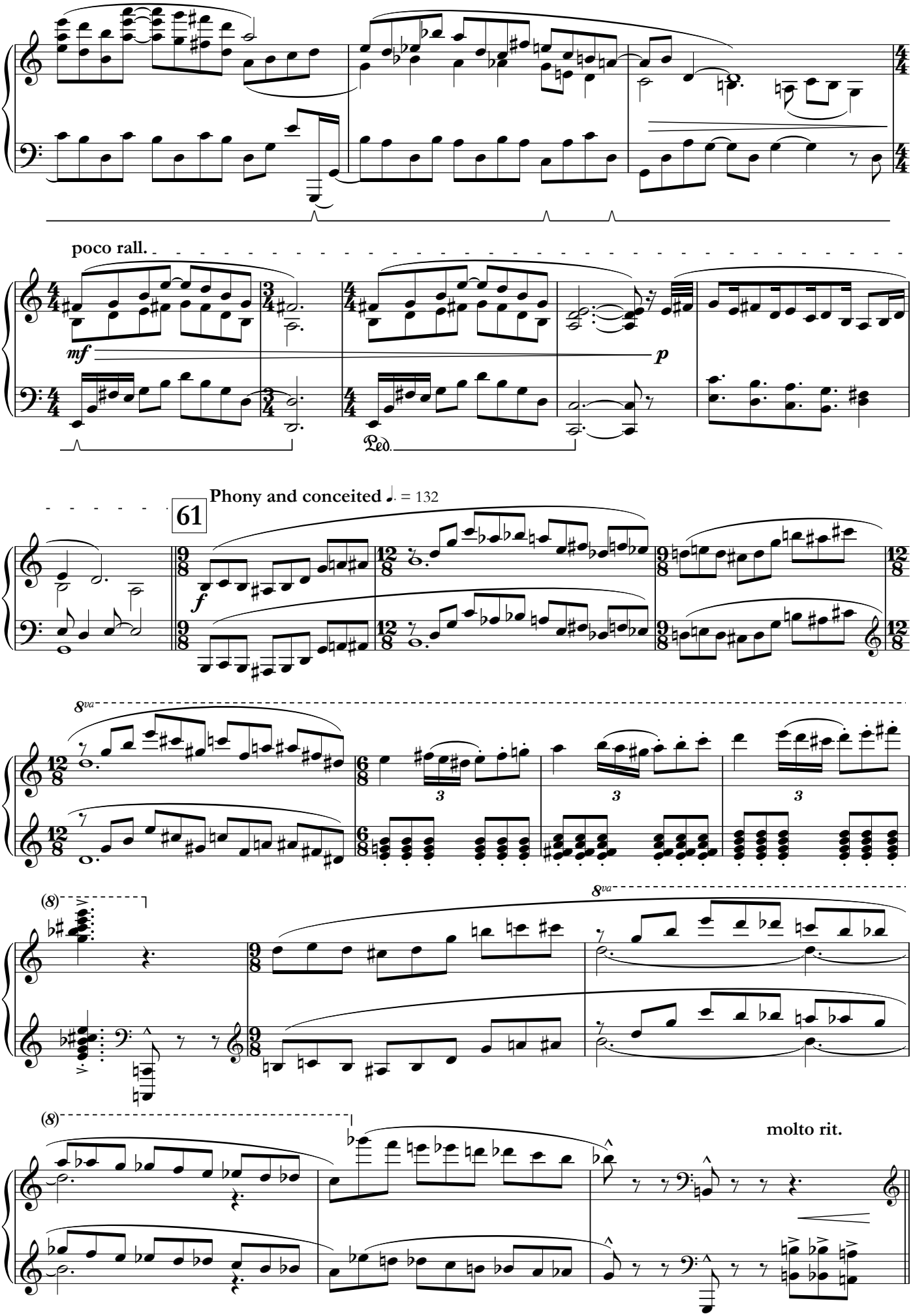
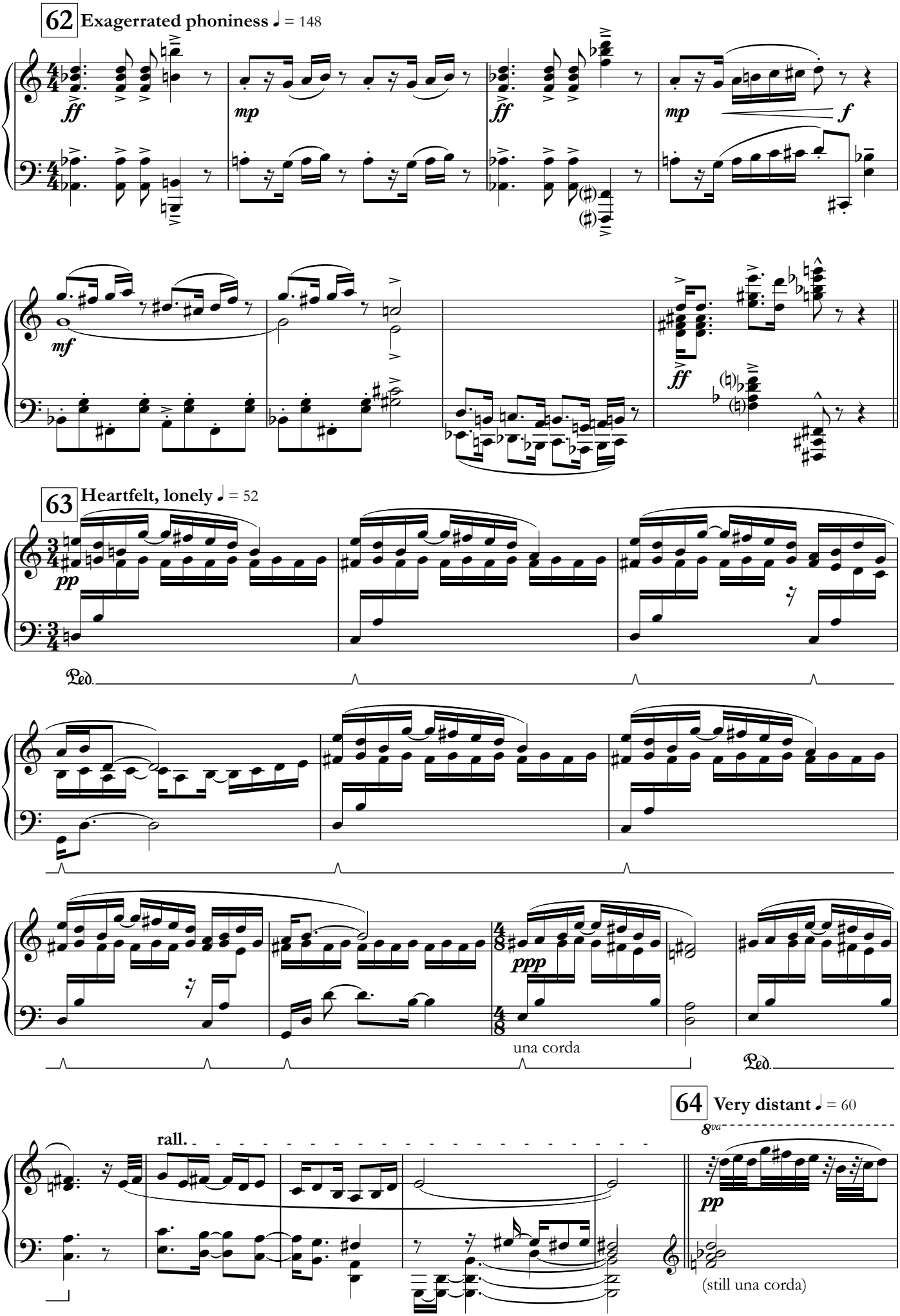
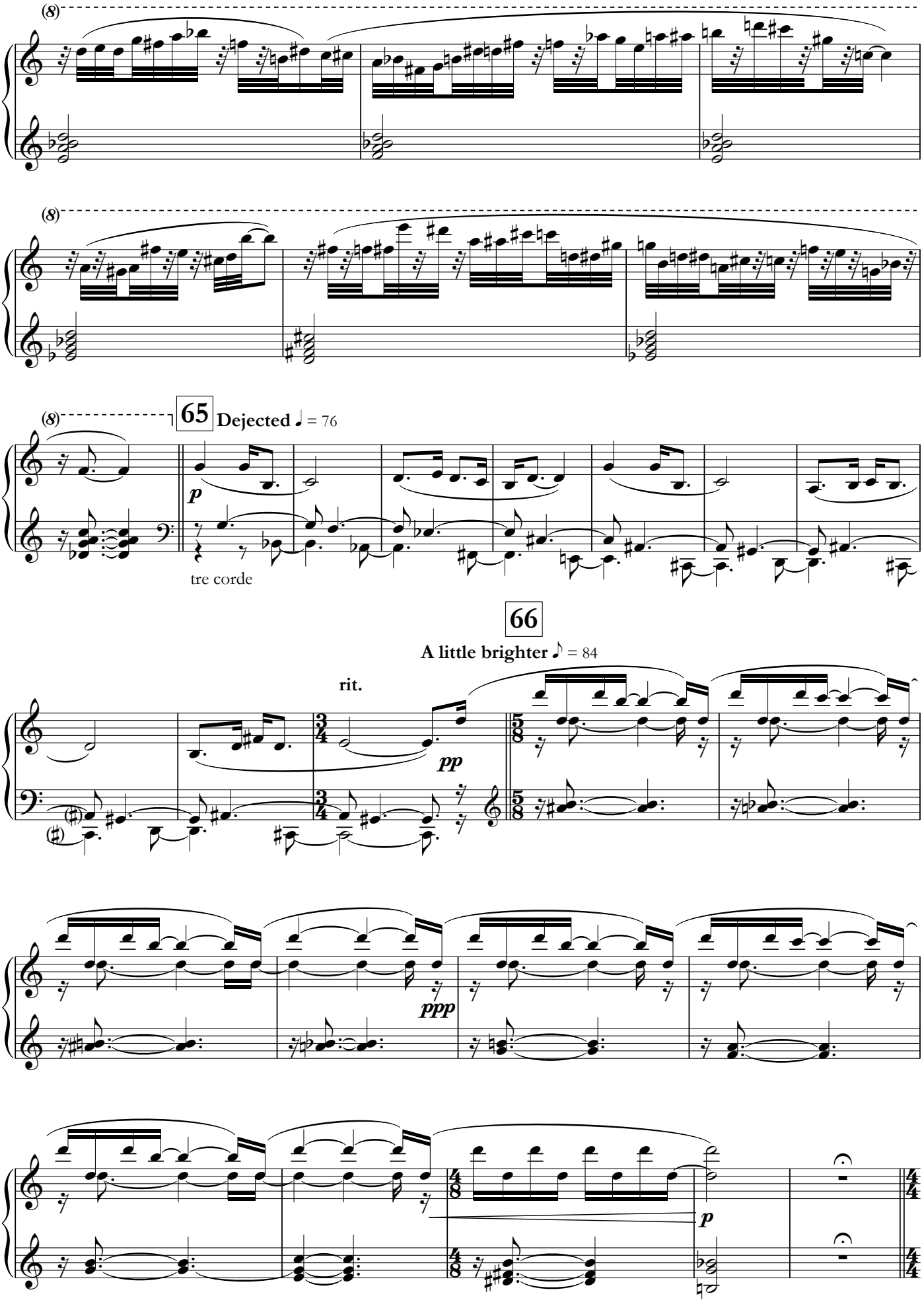
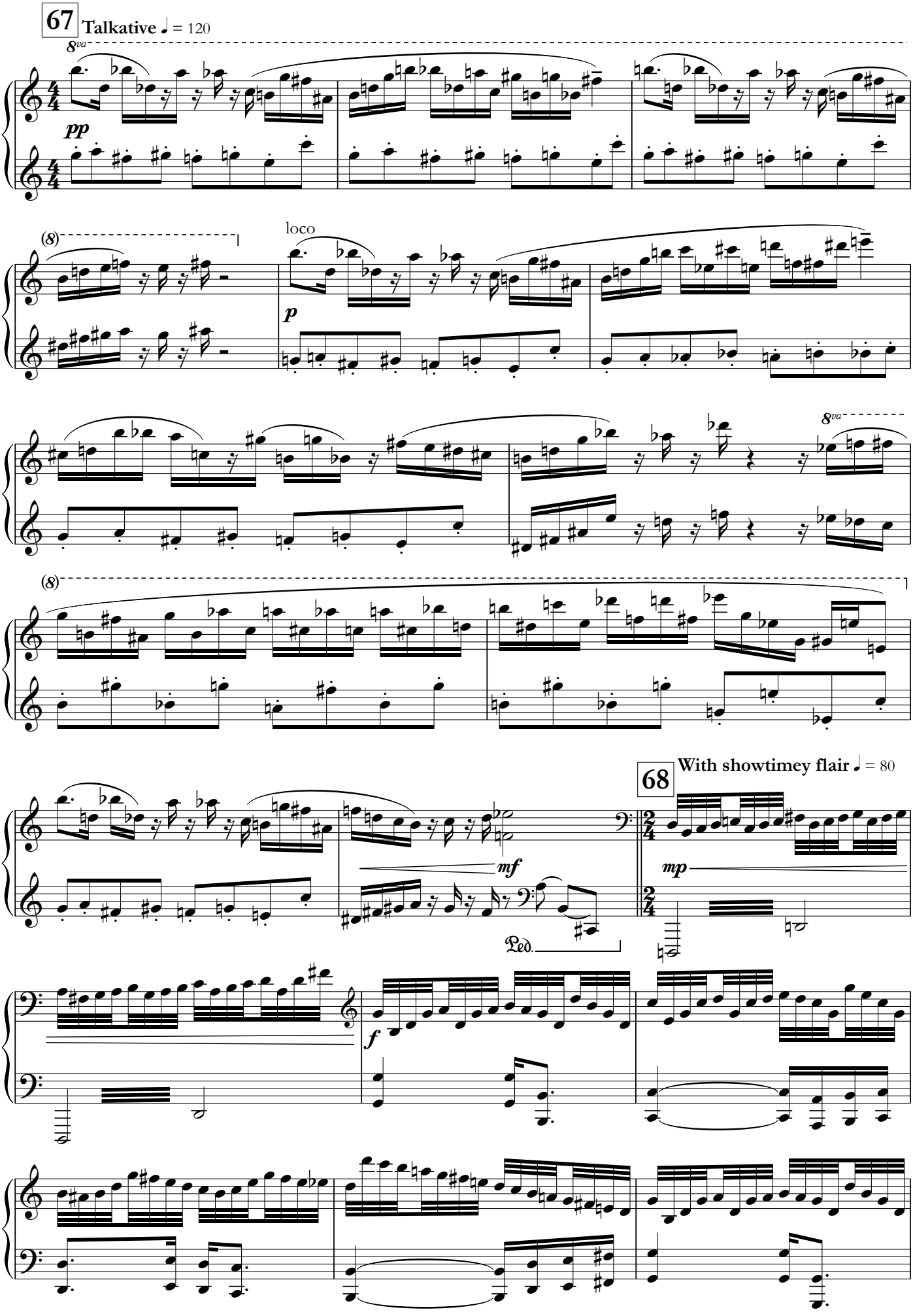
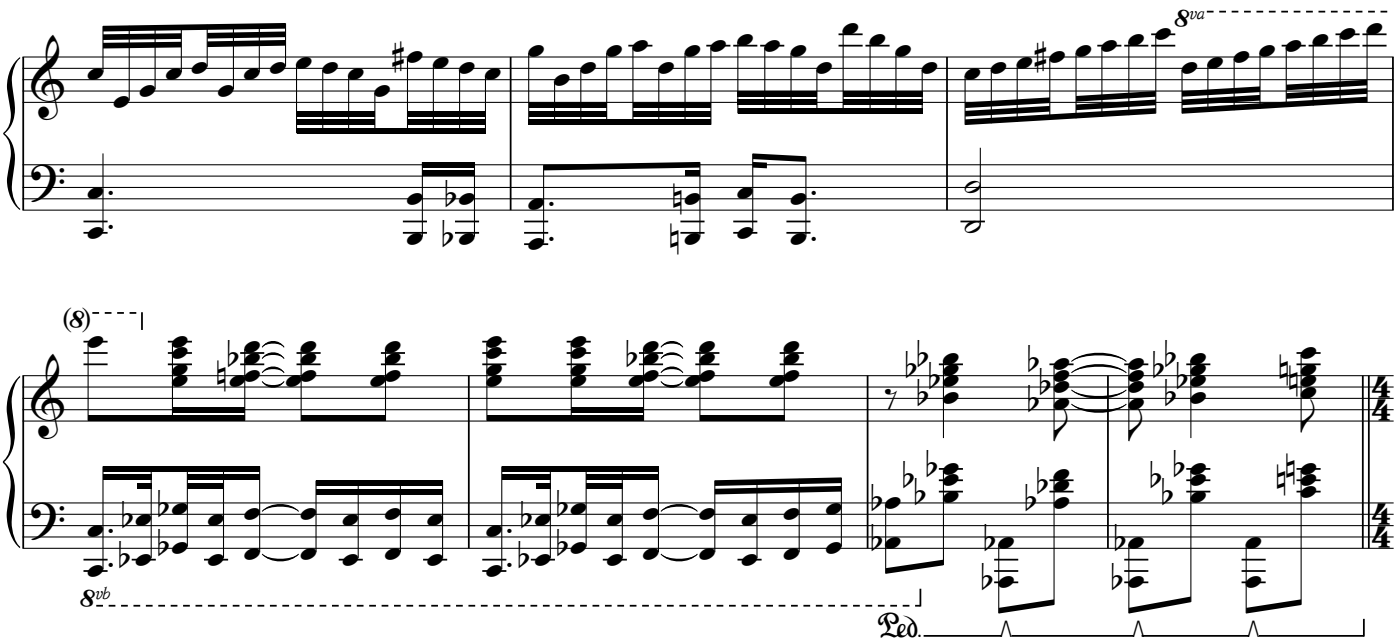

59
Carefree swing ♩ = 140
whistle
f
59
Carefree swing ♩ = 140
mp
8vb
(8)
(8)
60
Open-hearted (straight) 𝅗𝅥 = 60
60
Open-hearted (straight) 𝅗𝅥 = 60
f
Ped.


poco rall.
mf
p
Ped.
61
Phony and conceited ♩. = 132
f
8va
molto rit.


62 Exagerrated phoniness ♩ = 148
63 Heartfelt, lonely ♩ = 52
una corda
64 Very distant ♩ = 60
rall.
(still una corda)


(8)
(8)
(8)
65
Dejected ♩ = 76
p
tre corde
66
A little brighter ♪ = 84
rit.
pp
ppp
p


67
Talkative ♩ = 120
8va
pp
(8)
loco
p
8va
(8)
68
With showtimey flair ♩ = 80
mf
mp
Ped.
f



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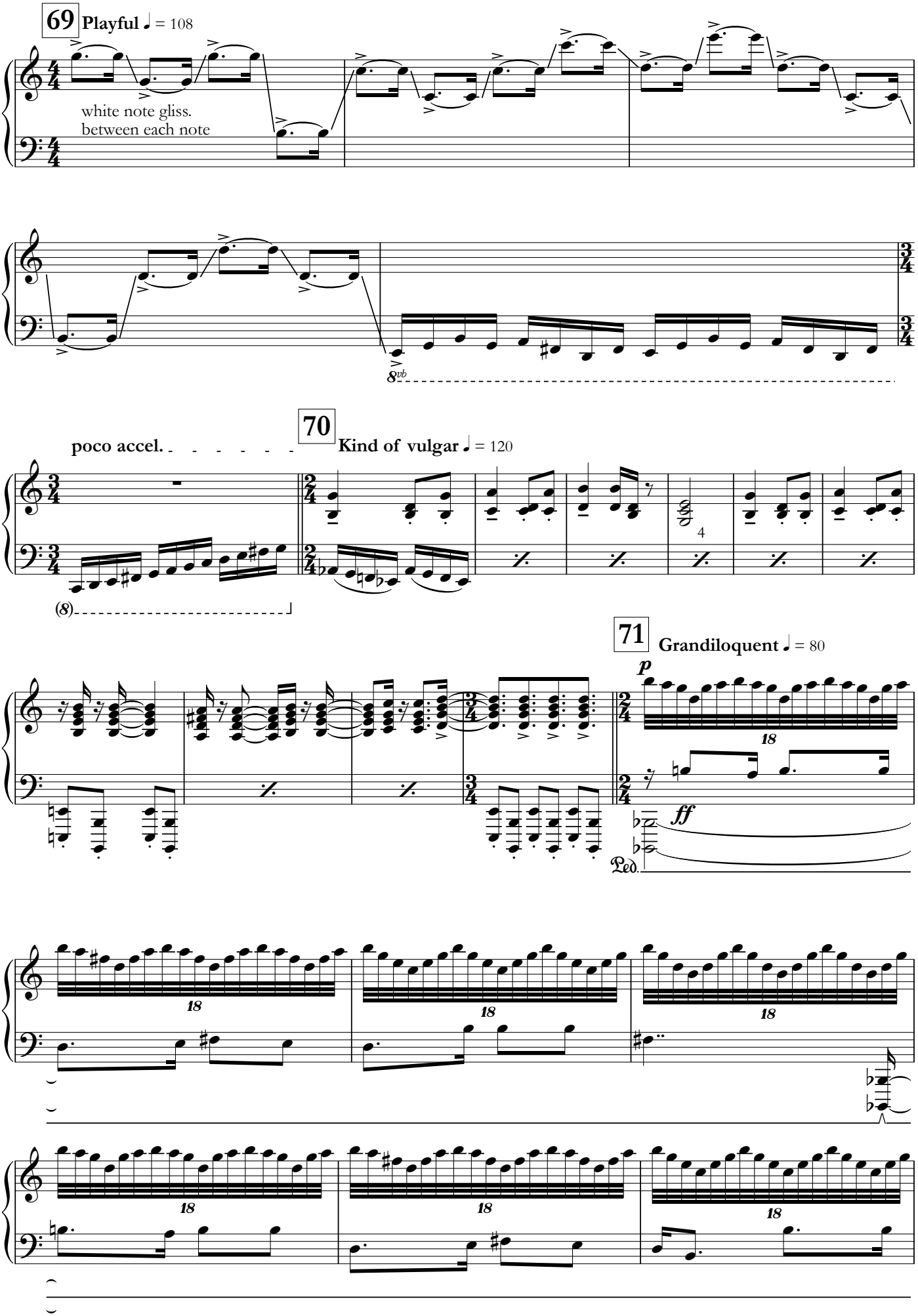
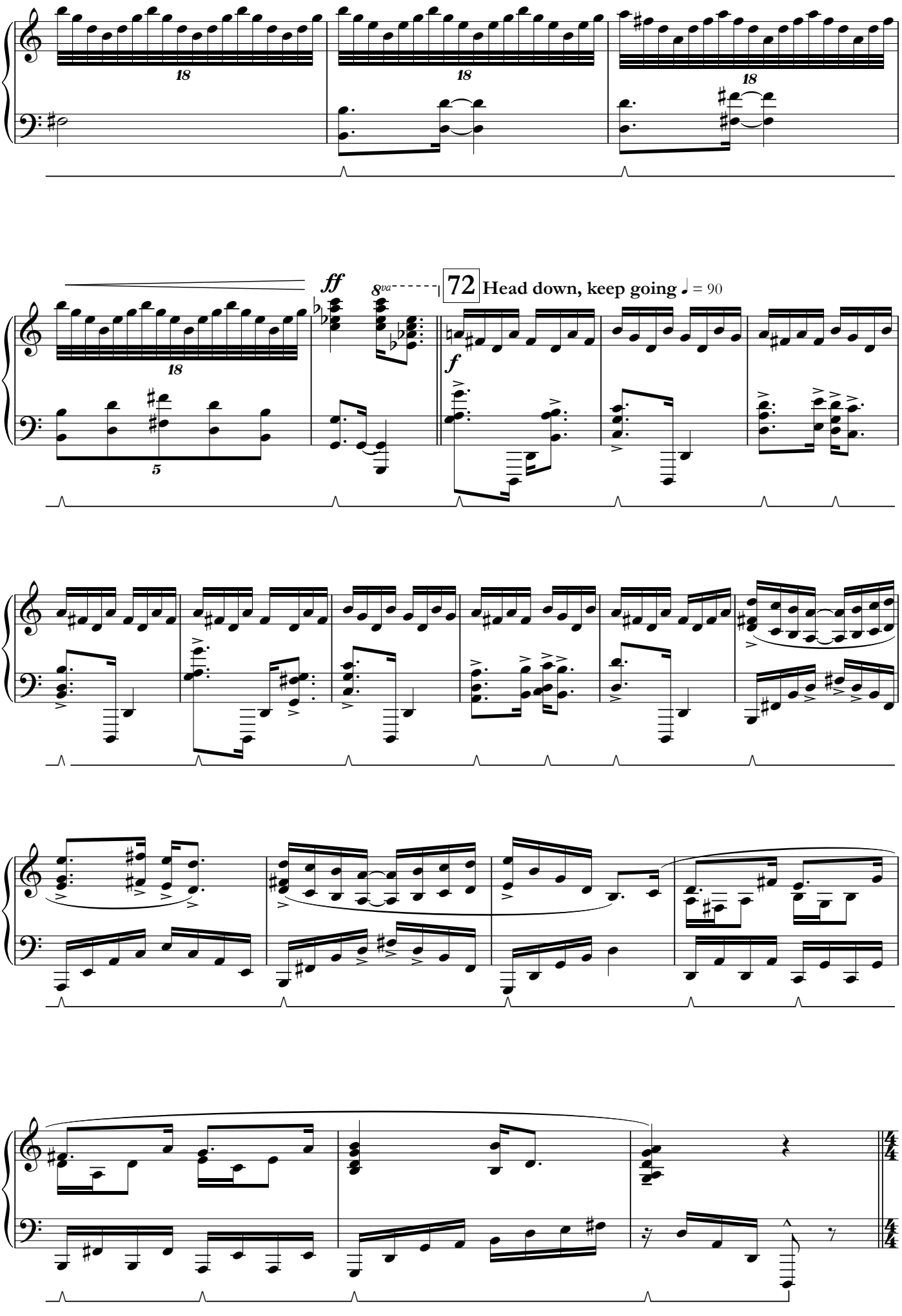
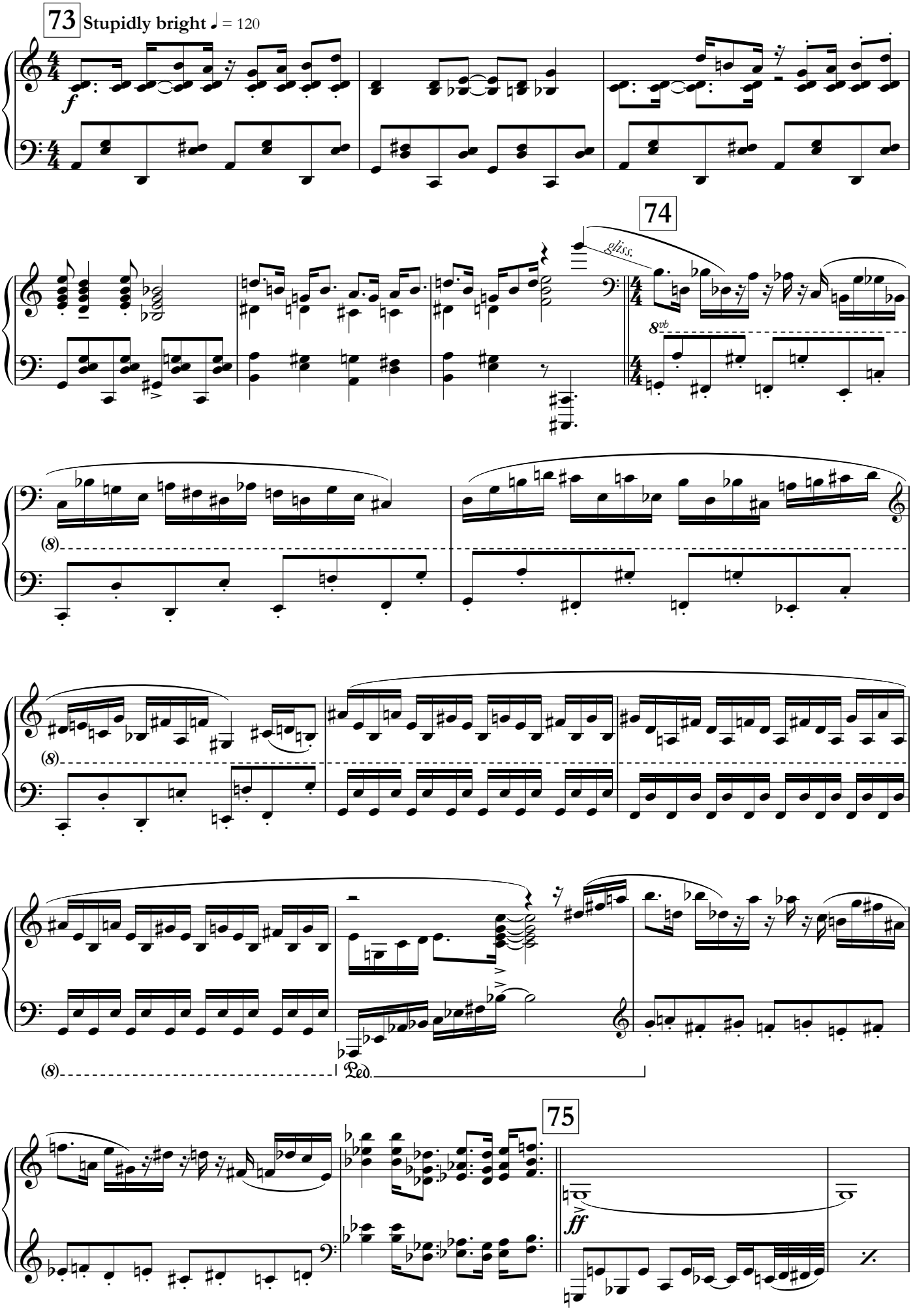
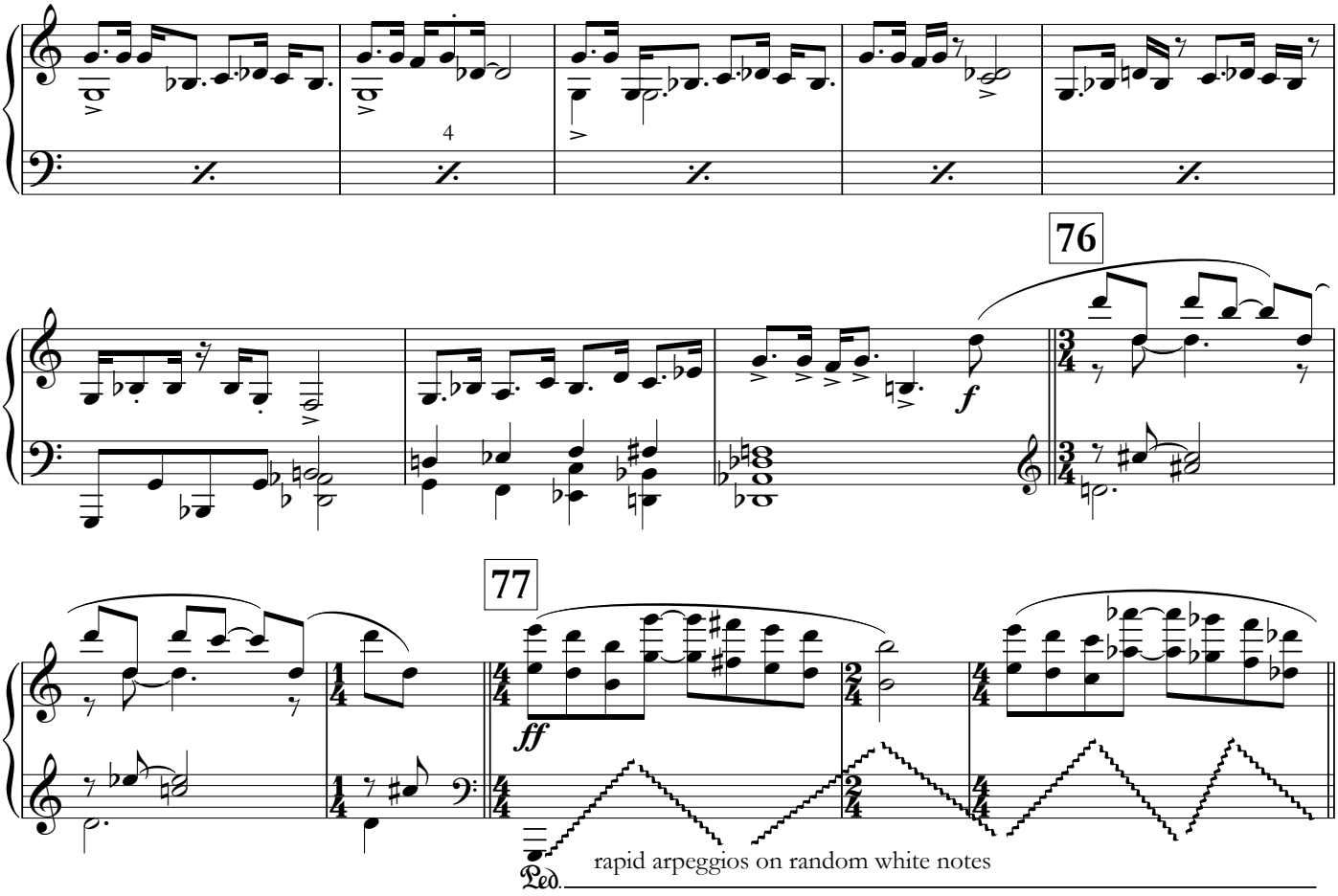

69
Playful ♩ = 108
white note gliss.
between each note
8vb
poco accel.
70
Kind of vulgar ♩ = 120
(8)
4
71
Grandiloquent ♩ = 80
p
18
ff
Ped.


18
18
18
ff
8va
72
Head down, keep going
♩ = 90
18
5
f


73
Stupidly bright ♩ = 120
f
74
gliss.
8vb
(8)
(8)
(8)
Ped.
75
ff



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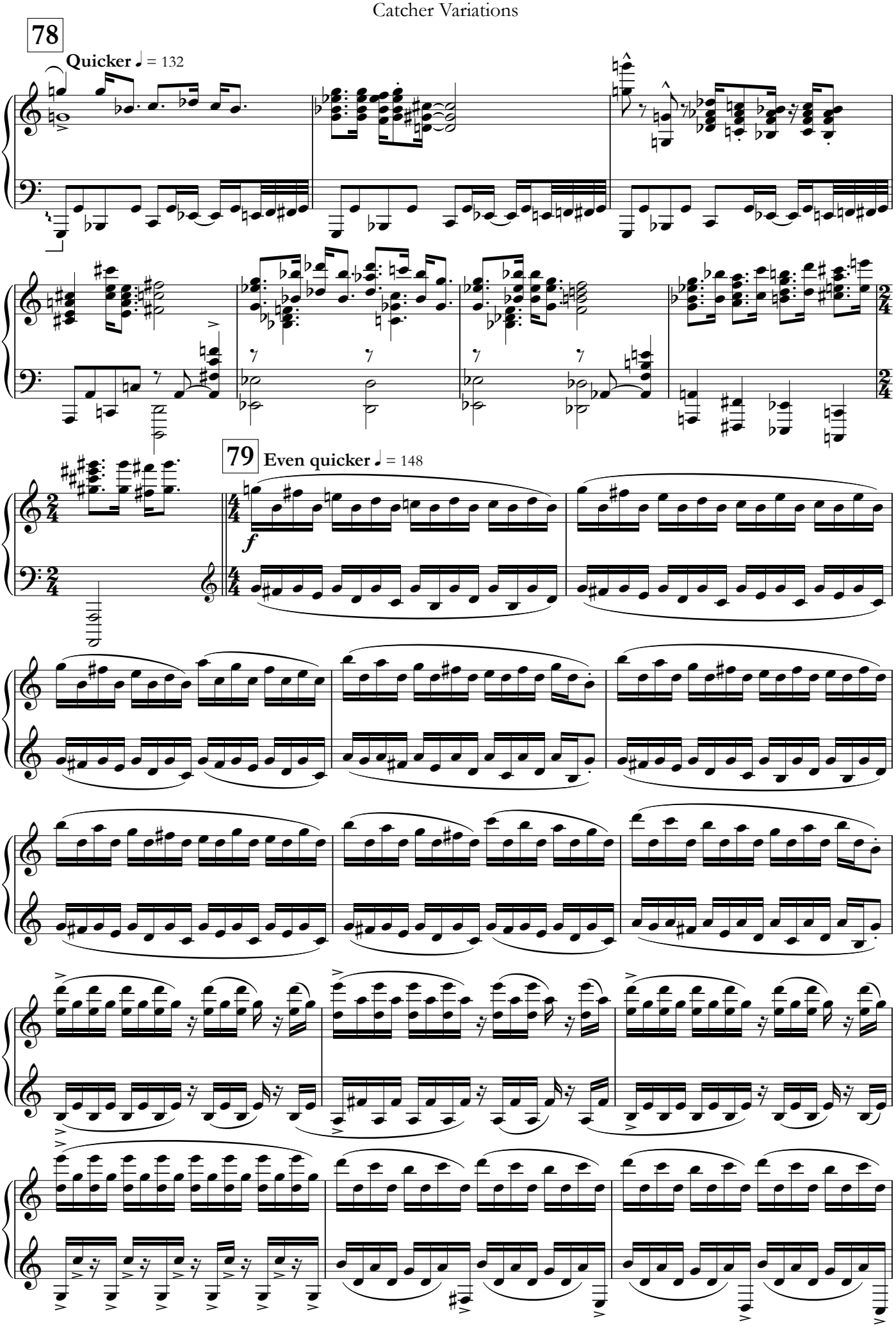

78
Quicker ♩ = 132
79
Even quicker ♩ = 148
f

Unhinged swing ♩ = 160

80 fairly random note clusters -
jab at the keys with fingers bunched together

8va

ff

mf

(8)

(8)

1

81 **Nearly giving up (straight)** 𝅗𝅥 = 90

ff

play with one finger

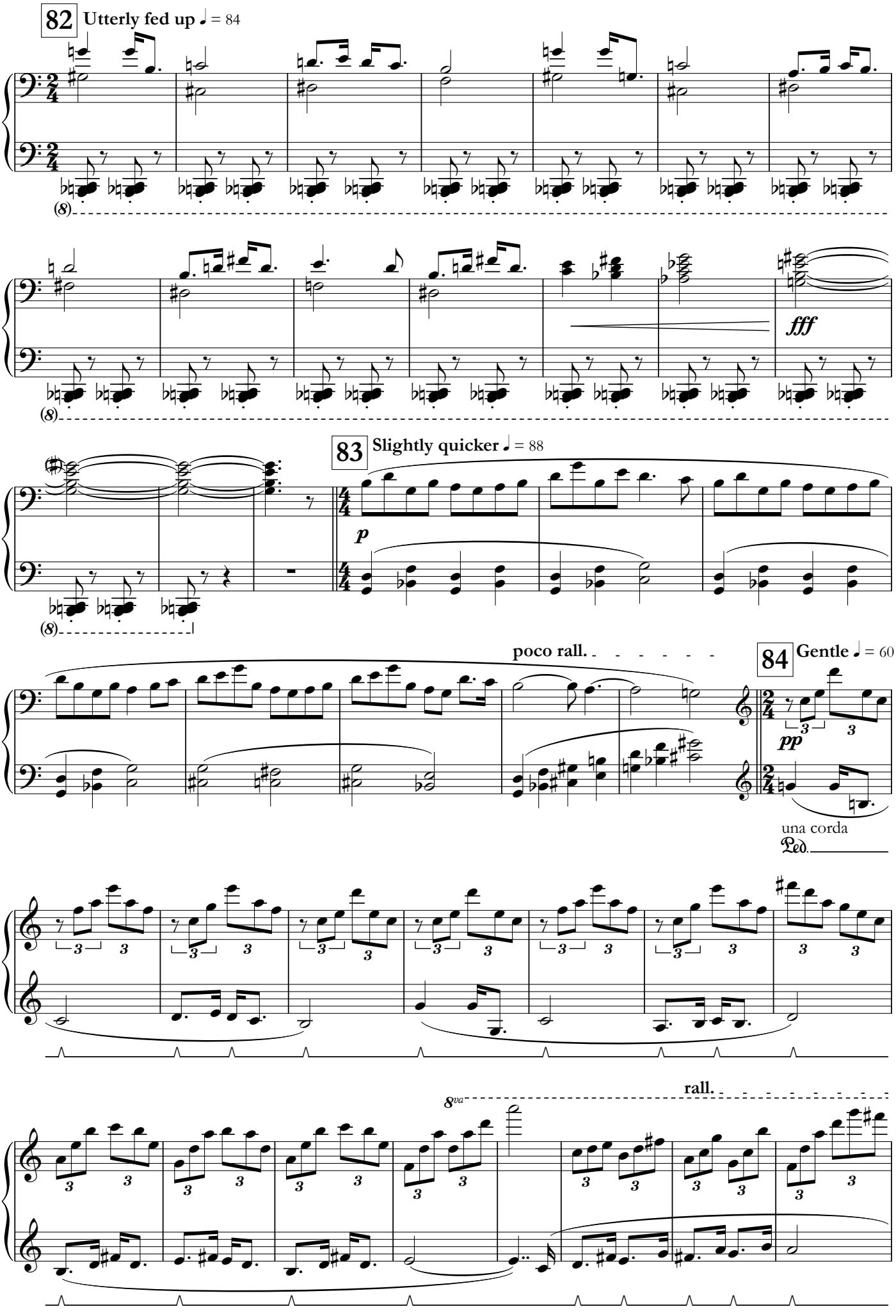
... well, almost!

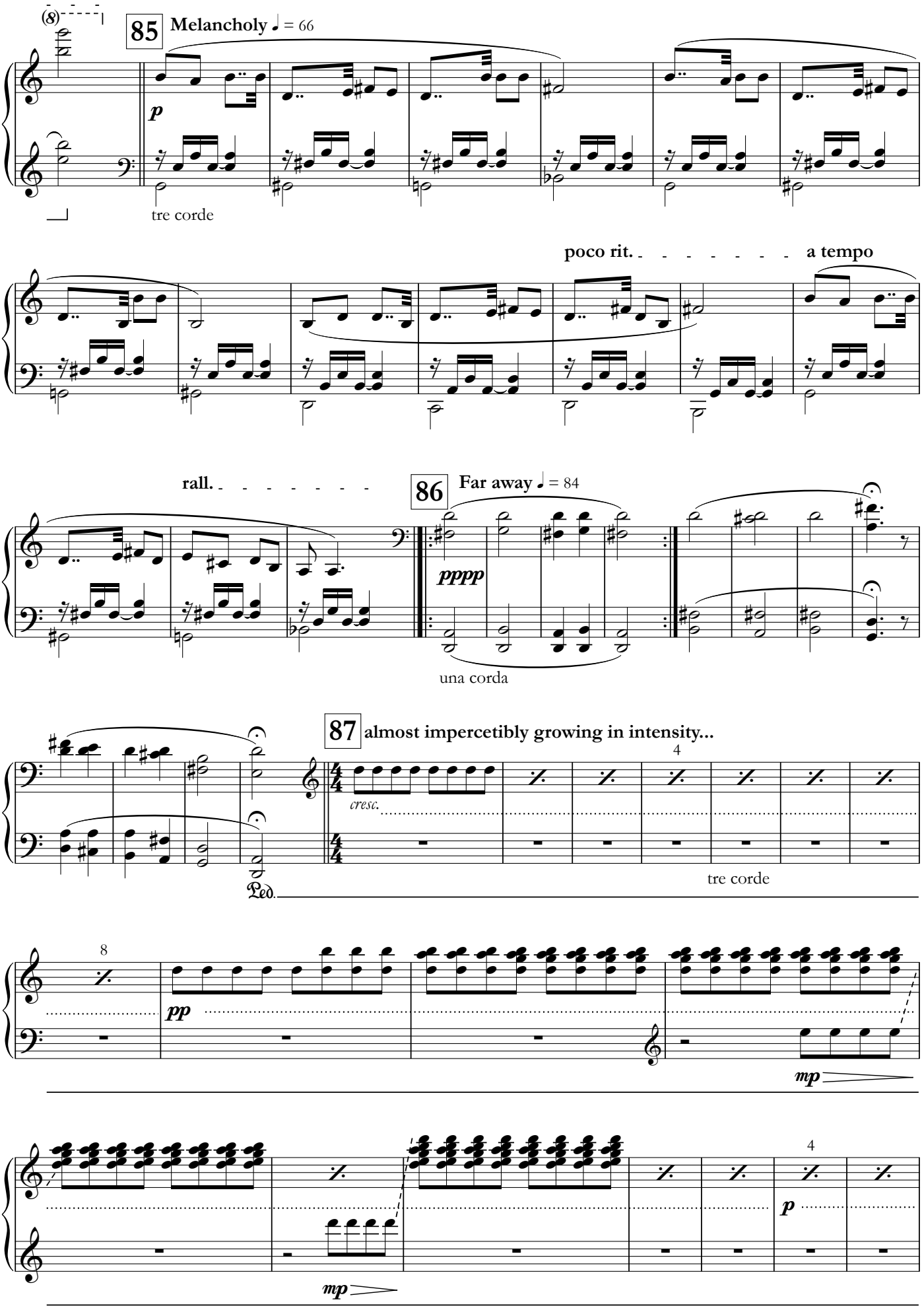
molto accel.

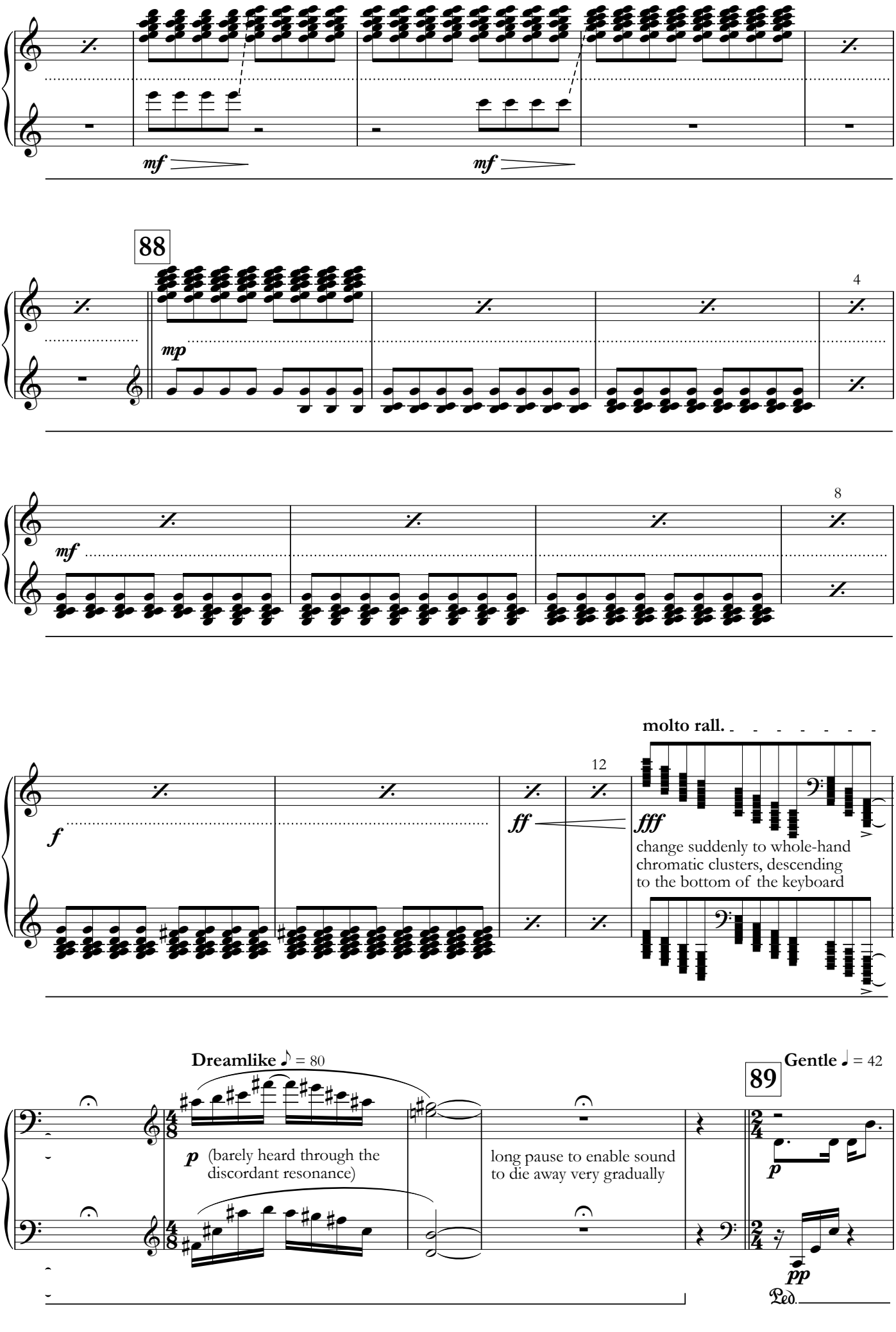
8vb

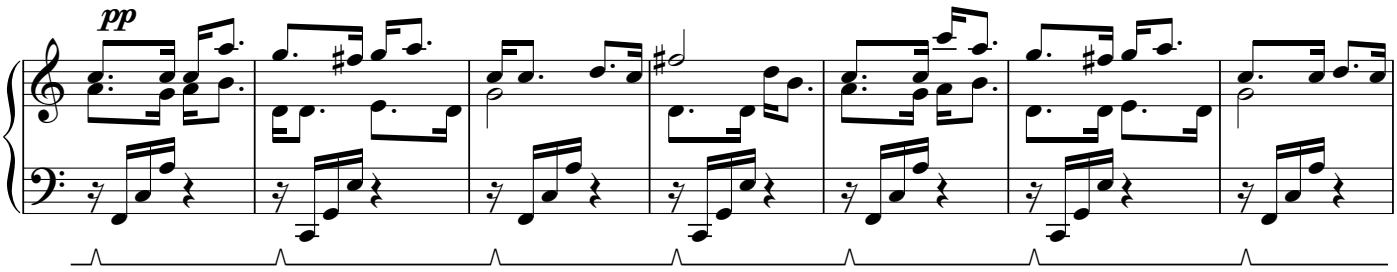
molto rall.

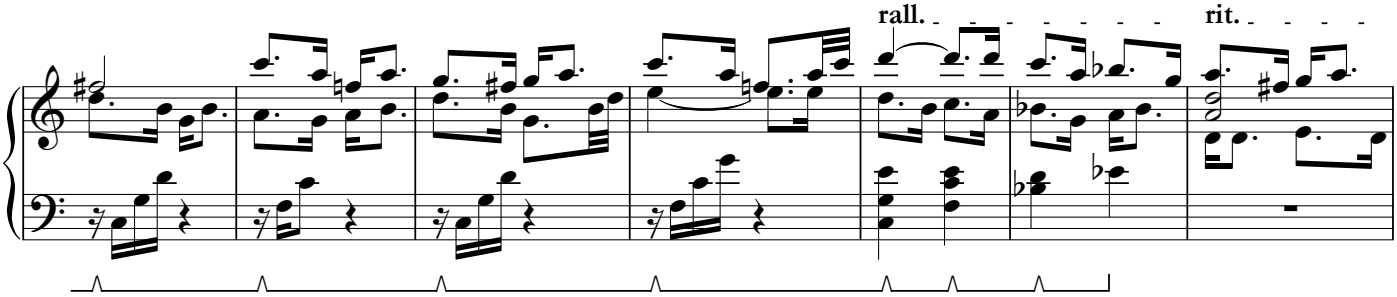
(8)

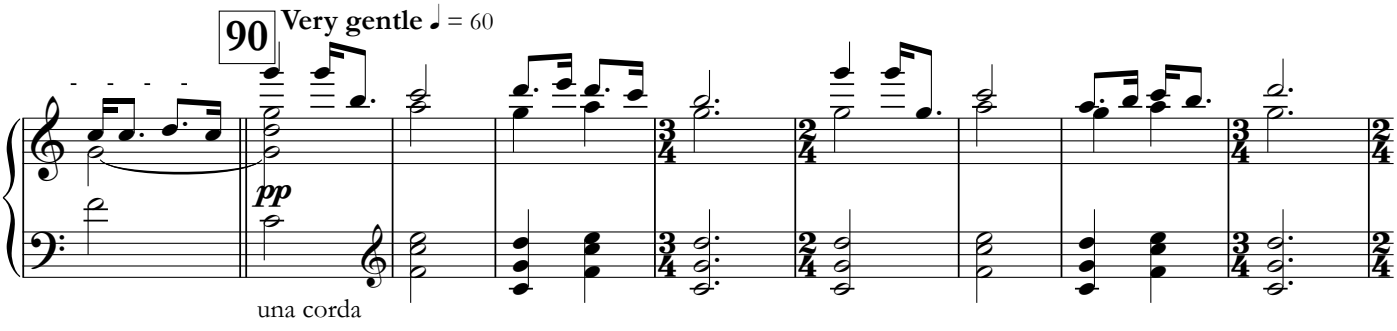

82 Utterly fed up ♩ = 84
(8)
fff
83 Slightly quicker ♩ = 88
p
poco rall.
84 Gentle ♩ = 60
pp
una corda
Ped.
8va
rall.

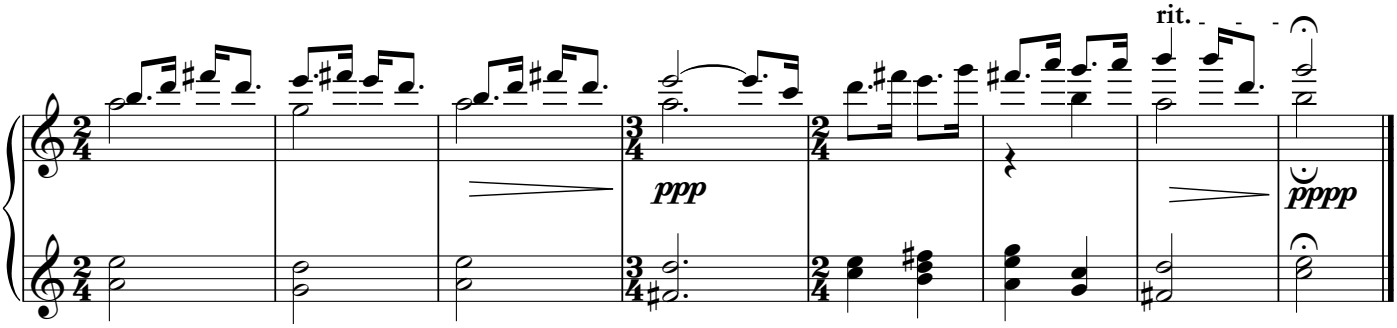

(8)
85
Melancholy ♩ = 66
p
tre corde
poco rit.
a tempo
rall.
86
Far away ♩ = 84
pppp
una corda
87
almost imperceptibly growing in intensity...
cresc.
4
Ped.
tre corde
8
pp
mp
4
p
mp


mf
mf
88
mp
4
mf
8
molto rall.
f
ff
fff
12
change suddenly to whole-hand
chromatic clusters, descending
to the bottom of the keyboard
Dreamlike ♪ = 80
p (barely heard through the
discordant resonance)
long pause to enable sound
to die away very gradually
89
Gentle ♩ = 42
p
pp
Ped.


pp


rall.
rit.


90
Very gentle ♩ = 60
pp
una corda


rit.
ppp
pppp

PART B

RECORDINGS

Track List with Details

Note: the two CDs can be found attached to the inside cover of this book.

CD 1

1. ***Teklanika Twilight*** 6:46

Melanie Walters (alto flute), Thalia Huston (horn), Jack de la Lande (percussion)
13 August 2016, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

2. ***The Imaginary Waltz*** **(toy piano version)** 3:43

David John Lang (toy piano and real piano)
5 October 2018, Madley Studio, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: David John Lang

3. ***The Imaginary Waltz*** **(ordinary piano version)** 4:01

Thea Maxwell (piano)
13 August 2016, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

4. ***Yukon Sunrise*** 6:04

Adelaide Wind Orchestra, conducted by David John Lang
22 March 2018, Concordia College Chapel, Highgate, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas
Producer: Anne Cawrse
Assistant: Adam Gillespie

5. ***Going on a Lion Hunt*** 10:12

Adelaide Wind Orchestra, conducted by Bryan Griffiths
9 July 2016, Concordia College Chapel, Highgate, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

6. ***Over the Hills and Far Away*** 16:44

Adelaide Wind Orchestra, conducted by David John Lang
Hannah Kovilpillai (oboe), Angelo Valdivia (4th trumpet), Simon Pazos (piano), Jack de la Lande (timpani), Jenny Hu, Elicia Baldwin, Will Madden & Kathleen Cowie (rubber ducks)
22 March 2018, Concordia College Chapel, Highgate, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas
Producer: Anne Cawrse
Assistant: Adam Gillespie

7. ***Cocoon*** 18:14

Melanie Walters (flute), Anna Coleman (clarinet), Lester Wong (violin), Jonathan Hall (cello), Jack de la Lande (vibraphone), Nicholas Bennett (piano)
13 August 2016, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

CD 2

Catcher Variations 37:53

1. Variations 1–25 8:29
2. Variations 26–47 9:07
3. Variations 48–66 8:36
4. Variations 67–90 11:41

David John Lang (piano)
10 February 2018, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

5. ***Jabberwocky*** (Appendix 1) 9:37

Natalie Tate (voice), Jesse Budel (melodica), Melanie Walters (flute/piccolo), Jillian Visser (cello), David John Lang (piano/harpsichord)
10 February 2018, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

6. ***Tiramisu*** (Appendix 2) 13:42

Elder Conservatorium Chamber Orchestra, directed by Lachlan Bramble
Carl Crossin (narrator)
31 May 2014, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, SA
Recording: Ray Thomas

PART C

EXEGESIS

1. 'Variations on a Theme' meets 'Musical Storytelling'

1.1. Introduction

There are many ways of listening to music, but one of my favourites is to hear it as a narrative. Being caught up in the ebb and flow of the music is like being captivated by the words of an expressive storyteller. The most memorable feedback I have received as a composer has been from listeners trying to articulate the stories they heard as the music unfolded.

I have long been impressed by the sense of drama that can be achieved in the traditional musical form of 'variations on a theme'. Noticing that this dramatic potential has rarely been used with the explicit intention to convey a narrative, I have chosen to adapt this model as the structural framework for a collection of original compositions, each intending to tell a story.

This exegesis focuses on the intersection of two concepts: 'variations on a theme' (a structural device) and 'storytelling' (a mode of expression). The methodology for this project is one of practice-led research, in which the primary outcome is music and the purpose of the research is to direct, inform and inspire that music.[1] A comprehensive discussion of variation form and the manifold theories of narrative is beyond the scope of this exegesis.

The portfolio contains three works for wind orchestra, two works for chamber ensembles and two solo piano works. In limiting myself to these resources, I have focused on how narrative can be conveyed through instrumental music in concert performance without the use of vocal, theatrical or visual elements. The requirement for a 'major work for large forces' has been met through a combination of three works for wind orchestra totalling 30 minutes, and a standalone 38-minute work for piano.

[1] I am in agreement with John Croft, who claims that to consider musical composition itself as a form of research is a 'category error'; while research may inform the creative process, it has no essential connection to the artistic merit of the completed work – 'good and bad music can be made from any system'. See John Croft, 'Composition is not Research,' *Tempo* 69, no. 272 (2015): 6–11. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298214000989.

Although I have not composed any vocal music for this project, I have not avoided words altogether. My desire to encourage a narrative listening strategy has meant that the program notes that accompany each piece have a much greater importance than is customary. Thus the program notes written for each work are, like the titles, intrinsic parts of those works, and so are included with the scores in the portfolio.

This exegesis, on the other hand, is not intended to be integral to an understanding or appreciation of the music by the average listener – but it may help. It serves as a personal exploration of the research topic, an analysis of the compositions and a reflection on my own developing aesthetic. Because of the personal nature of this document, I have not refrained from using first person, and moments of candour and humour may occasionally show through in the writing (like they do in the music), as though I'm actually enjoying myself beneath this dour, scholarly exterior.

Two additional original compositions relevant to the exegesis are included in an appendix; having been composed prior to the beginning of my candidature, they cannot be considered a formal part of the submission, but nevertheless provide important background material.

In music – as in literature, I would argue – a story carries far greater force when conveyed through physical sound than merely in the abstract. Thus I have endeavoured to provide live recordings of all the works in the portfolio, and although I make no claim to their being 'definitive' (for I do not believe that is a possible or desirable outcome in a performance art), they are a vital part of the submission.[2]

1.2. Defining the terms: 'Variations on a Theme'

There are two problems I have often struggled with as a composer: a tendency to fill a piece with 'too many ideas', and a lack of certainty about how to build a coherent structure. A set of 'variations on a theme' offers solutions to both these problems: it limits itself to a single theme, and it has a simple, linear structure built from small, detachable units. In other words, it's like a wooden railway set: all the pieces are designed to carry the same train, and they come in small chunks that are easy to fit

[2] 'Sounds are not a means of mediation by which we are enabled to hear music; they constitute the reality of music, and they effect the realization of its persona.' Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 106.

together and fun to play around with. The remaining problem is figuring out what order to put them in.

'Variations on a theme' – which I shall also refer to as 'variation form' – has a long history, stretching back to improvised strophic music for song and dance in the 16th century.[3] Today, it is most commonly understood as a musical form consisting of a clearly delineated theme followed by a series of discrete but linked variations. Each variation can be recognised as a repetition of the original theme that has been altered in a specific and consistent way to form an 'intelligible unit in itself'.[4]

The limits of what constitutes variation form are not clearly drawn, but for my purposes its essential features are its monothematicism and its cellular structure. This differentiates it from Schoenberg's concept of 'developing variation', which is more of a technique than a structure – being motivically- rather than thematically-based, 'developing variation' doesn't necessitate the music's division into clearly articulated segments the way that 'variation form' does. It is important to distinguish between variation as a *process* and variation *form*. My interest is primarily structural.

Notwithstanding occasional introductions and interludes (not to mention the 'double variations' of Haydn), variation form is essentially monothematic. Indeed, Hans Keller calls the form 'monothematicism at its purest… You can't get more monothematic than that, for if you did, you would land in mere, sheer repetition.'[5]

Which brings us to the uncertain boundary between variation form and minimalism – territory that I explore in most of the pieces in the portfolio. Elaine Sisman suggests that the key lies in the size of the units that make up the form – 'Very tiny ostinatos produce the feeling of pulsations rather than structures to be varied.'[6] Thematic units vary in size across variation form repertoire, from well-developed, seemingly self-contained segments several minutes in length, to the short harmonic progressions found in chaconne and passacaglia. The limits are vague, but they do exist: too large, and a theme may seem to encompass several themes; too small, and a theme becomes more of

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[3] Elaine Sisman, 'Variations,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29050.
[4] Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948), 128.
[5] Hans Keller, 'Art as Departure,' in *Essays on Music*, ed. Christopher Wintle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38.
[6] Sisman, 'Variations.'

an ostinato. Monothematicism being my primary concern, I have pushed towards the smaller end of the scale, and even where my themes have become, arguably, 'ostinatos', I have tried to treat them thematically, resolutely keeping them as foreground material (themes tend to drift to the background in a chaconne or passacaglia, somewhat compromising the perceived monothematicism of the work).

Variation form is intrinsically repetitive, its foundation being the sameness of its material. In this it is directly opposed to forms built on balance and contrast,[7] such as sonata form or the alternating verse and chorus structure of many pop songs, where the emphasis is on difference. For Wilson Coker, this is a distinction between 'homogeneous' and 'heterogeneous' forms.[8] Whatever outward displays it has of stylistic variety and contrast, its monothematicism makes variation form essentially homogeneous.

Variation form is also strongly linear – the variations must be placed in sequence. But how do these units relate to each other? If each variation is independently derived from the theme, then there is no direct relationship between them. This can result in a seemingly arbitrary additive structure, with a series of variations having 'no necessary ordering or ending point beyond local convention'.[9]

There are two ways around this problem. In classical or virtuoso variations, the primary purpose is often to embellish or decorate the theme – like working on a sculpture, getting 'a multitude of views of the same object'.[10] The theme is treated as a static entity, established at the outset, and the variations have no need to 'go' anywhere but back to the theme, again and again. To satisfy the demand for a sequence, they are usually placed in order of increasing complexity (Calvin Brown notes 'a general tendency for the later variations to depart further from the original theme than the earlier ones'[11]). The rationale for this seems to be that with each repeat the foundational theme becomes more stable in the mind of the listener, freeing up cognitive room for

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[7] Brown, *Music and Literature*, 103.
[8] Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 76–77.
[9] Sisman, 'Variations'.
[10] Jeffrey Swinkin, 'Variation as Thematic Actualisation: The Case of Brahms's Op. 9,' *Music Analysis* 31, no. 1 (2012): 37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23322092.
[11] Brown, *Music and Literature*, 128.

the perception of ever more intricate foreground material.[12] To bring the set to a satisfactory conclusion, the culminating variation or coda often points back to the theme in its original, simpler guise, thus creating a sense of return, the completion of a circle.

A different solution to the segmented, paratactic nature of variation form was developed in the Romantic period, following the example of Beethoven. Here the theme as it first appears is not a completed, fixed entity; instead, the variations 'reinterpret' the theme, bring it to life, transform it. The variations are placed in an order to gradually reveal the theme's 'true' nature. Jeffrey Swinkin calls this process 'thematic actualisation'.[13]

The necessity of connecting the variations to each other in a logical and coherent way becomes all the more vital in the context of musical storytelling, because a narrative requires causal relationships between sequential events. In each of my compositions I have tried to find creative ways to invest the sequence of variations with narrative logic. In effect, the units become not just variations on a theme, but also variations on each other.

But with so much emphasis on the progression from one variation to another, the independence of each variation as a unique segment can be lost. Is this a problem? It is if you are trying to avoid making a feature of the inherently repetitive nature of the form. According to Calvin Brown, each variation should have its own particular character, because without this, he argues, 'the variations cannot be kept separate and the result is a pointless alteration which is neither variation nor systematic development.'[14] This charge could easily be levelled at *Going on a Lion Hunt* and *Over the Hills and Far Away* – but it is my hope that the narrative thrust of each piece makes the incremental alteration of the theme far from 'pointless'.

Finally, it should be noted that the whole idea of conveying a 'story' through variations on a theme is at odds with the way the form is commonly perceived. Historically, 'variations on a theme' have almost always been considered as 'absolute music', often appearing as a movement in a symphony or sonata, or as a standalone piece whose title refers to no more than the source of the theme. Even when the theme is already well

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[12] Elizabeth Margulis discusses how musical repetition makes such 'attentional shifts' possible – see Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74.
[13] Swinkin, 'Variation as Thematic Actualisation', 37.
[14] Brown, *Music and Literature*, 131.

known, whatever extra-musical connotations it may carry are often largely irrelevant; the focus is more likely to be on the inventiveness of the composer or the virtuosity of the performer. I am deliberately going against this tradition.

It may very well be argued that most of the compositions in my portfolio are not, strictly speaking, variations on a theme. But that is because the form exists to serve the music, not the other way around. And the music exists to tell a story…

1.3. Defining the terms: 'Musical Storytelling'

There isn't a lot scholarship on 'musical storytelling', but 'musical narrative' has been the subject of much discussion.[15] I will highlight the philosophical claims that I believe each of these terms implies and explain why I have chosen the former in the title of my exegesis.

There has been much debate over whether music can truly be considered as 'narrative', and under what conditions; many of the disagreements go back to the definition of narrative itself. One of the most influential papers to address a definition is the 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' by Roland Barthes, and although he begins by emphasizing that narrative is found all over the world in many different forms, his long list of 'vehicles of narrative' does not include music.[16] This seems a significant oversight (deliberate or not), for there is a long history of music – even wordless, so-called 'absolute' music – being appreciated and analysed in narrative terms.[17]

A scholarly defence of 'music as narrative' has been built upon the theories of structuralist narratology, in which narrative is defined in terms of plot functions. If narrative can be abstracted in this way and remain recognisable, it is argued, then

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[15] See especially: Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 11–37.

[16] '… myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings… stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation.' No mention of music! Roland Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,' trans. Lionel Duisit, *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (1975): 237, https://doi.org/10.2307/468419.

[17] 'The idea that instrumental music, and especially the extended musical essays of composers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, might be understood as narratives is a staple of humanist music criticism.' Levinson lists Donald Tovey, George Bernard Shaw, Leonard Bernstein, Antony Hopkins, Charles Rosen, Andrew Porter and Alex Ross as writers who have demonstrated a narrative approach to musical analysis and criticism. Jerrold Levinson, 'Music as Narrative and Music as Drama,' *Mind and Language* 19 no. 4 (2004): 428–429, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0268-1064.2004.00267.x.

music's own level of abstraction (its inability to clearly represent characters, objects or actions) does not prevent it from being heard and understood as narrative. According to Fred Maus, 'Narrative theory abstracts from individual narratives in somewhat the same way that instrumental music abstracts from everyday human action.'[18] Byron Almén writes from a similar viewpoint and defines musical narrative as

> … a psychologically and socially meaningful articulation of hierarchical relationships and our responses to them… It is centrally concerned with conflict and its resolution. It is *not* essentially dependent on actorial categories for its realization. And it is *not* a parasitical category of meaning derived from literature, but instead features a medium-specific inflection of a more general 'narrative' principle. Finally, insofar as music displays narrative patterns without the semantic specificity of literature and drama, it is capable of articulating these patterns with wider applicability and greater immediacy.[19]

Many object to such a broad definition of narrative, claiming that no narrative can truly be said to exist until we put it into words. Stephen McClatchie argues that 'music becomes narrative only through our linguistic constitution of it'.[20] In other words, the stories we hear in music are our own inventions, not taken from the music but built on top of it[21] – merely 'superfluous metaphors', according to Jean-Jacques Nattiez.[22] 'Music is not a narrative, but an incitement to make a narrative.'[23] Nattiez proposes that music is, at best, 'proto-narrative' – offering a framework on which a narrative can be built.[24]

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[18] Fred Everett Maus, 'Music as Narrative,' *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991): 15, http://hdl.handle.net/2022/3432.
[19] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 27.
[20] Stephen McClatchie, 'Narrative Theory and Music; or, The Tale of Kundry's Tale,' *Canadian University Music Review* 18, no. 1 (1997): 13, https://doi.org/10.7202/1014817ar.
[21] One may question, as Matthew McDonald has (in 'Silent Narration? Elements of Narrative in Ives's The Unanswered Question,' *Nineteenth Century Music* 27 no. 3 [2004]: 266, https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2004.27.3.263) why the composer's intent can be deemed so irrelevant – the answer is in the separation of the 'poietic' and 'esthesic' levels of musical semiology, discussed below.
[22] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?' trans. Katharine Ellis, *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association* 115, no. 2 (1990): 257, https://www.jstor.org/stable/766438.
[23] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 128.
[24] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, 'The Narrativization of Music. Music: Narrative or Proto-Narrative?' *Human & Social Studies: Research and Practice* 2, no. 2 (2013): 64–65, https:/doi.org/10.2478/hssr-2013-0004.

Perhaps this is all just a confusion of terminology: what is simply 'narrative' to some musicologists (such as Maus and Almén) is 'proto-narrative' to Nattiez, who rightly wants to see a distinction between literary and musical narratives. But there's something annoyingly abstruse about the whole argument, which puts music in a kind of conceptual vacuum and tries to reduce it to mere patterns of sound – a musicological approach that Christopher Small is deeply critical of.[25] Music may be incapable of embodying narrative when it is considered as an isolated aural phenomenon; but then it never *is* an isolated aural phenomenon in the real world, so – at least for a composer – it is a moot point.

More relevant (and for me more troubling) is the presumption that narratives are, so to speak, merely in the eye of the beholder; that they have no ontological truth outside the mind of an individual. This naturally destroys the possibility of meaningful musical communication – a consequence that Nattiez seems happy to admit in his formulation of a musical semiology, which sees no essential connection between producer and receiver.[26] As Michael Klein explains, Nattiez breaks the chain of communication into three isolated levels:

> On the poietic level, a composer may wish to write music that narrates, focusing on musical attributes that she believes will signal that narration. On the immanent level, the music may have such attributes, regardless of whether the composer intends to write narrative music. On the esthesic level, a listener may want to hear music as she hears a narration, regardless of composer intent or musical attributes.[27]

Such a model may have its uses, but taken as a foundation for musical narrative it totally destroys the common-sense approach to what narrative is: stories that connect us, that are *bigger* than us. It makes 'narrative' such a subjective, individual thing as to be basically meaningless – at least for a composer like me who believes in art's capacity for transcendence.[28]

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[25] Indeed, Christopher Small goes so far as to suggest that 'there is no such thing in the Western concert tradition as "absolute music"'. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 153.
[26] Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, 16–17.
[27] Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 115.
[28] Unfortunately, a complete formulation of my own 'theology of musical narrative' is well beyond the scope of this exegesis. But I have found a good starting point in Jeremy Begbie's *Theology, music and time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

If this is how 'narrative' is understood in academic circles, then it is not the right term for my purposes. I think it is more useful to consider narrative as something music *does* rather than what it *is* (or might be): music as *storyteller* rather than music as *narrative*.[29] I take the term 'storytelling' from Christopher Small, who prefers the verb to the noun (as with 'musicking' to 'music') and believes that 'there is a sense in which all musicking can be thought of as a process of storytelling'.[30]

This doesn't solve all the problems mentioned above with defining 'musical narrative', but it does make them easier to discuss by making them less abstract. Whether or not music *is* narrative, everyone is familiar with music that 'tells a story' in some way (whatever rules it may be breaking to do so!).[31] And this is the tradition in which I wish to place my music.

Music is clearly used as an *aid* to storytelling in many genres – song, opera, ballet, film and drama spring readily to mind. When paired with another form of expression – words, pictures, physical gestures – music can be a very powerful storyteller. And perhaps it is because of the associations built up through this use that many listeners are able to hear stories even when music is presented alone – take the words away, and a shadow of their meaning still remains in the music. Peter Kivy calls this the 'convention' theory of musical expressiveness, the idea that music picks up its extra-musical meaning through the contexts of its use. Behind this is the 'contour' theory, linking musical shape with the speech contours that express certain emotions.[32] Christopher Small highlights the role of medieval troubadours and the earliest opera composers – their deliberate pairing of music with highly expressive text – in establishing the representational codes of music that underpin the whole Western symphonic tradition and continue to influence art music today.[33]

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[29] 'In… extrageneric musical meaning… one can regard the musical work as an organism, a sort of spokesman who addresses listeners. The musical organism has as its object getting us involved in feeling the qualities of the experience as the music lives through it for and with us.' Coker, *Music and Meaning*, 190.
[30] Small, *Musicking*, 139.
[31] Klein would argue that 'it is not that music wants to narrate, but that we want to hear music in the ways that we hear a narration. We want to hear stories.' (Klein, *Intertexuality*, 115). But that is, again, to completely separate the esthesic level from the poietic (to use Nattiez's terms), which I do not believe is warranted.
[32] Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 71–83.
[33] Small, *Musicking*, 144–157.

These codes of meaning and expression made possible the rise of instrumental 'program music' in the 19th century. Although there are several isolated examples from earlier (Biber's *Battalia*, Kuhnau's *Biblical Sonatas*, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*), it was Hector Berlioz who took it to a whole new level when he wrote out a detailed 'program' for his *Symphonie fantastique* and specified that it should be made available to the audience at every performance of the work. The program note elucidates the story that Berlioz wants his music to tell.

This concept was taken further in the development of the symphonic poem, where the aim was, according to Franz Liszt, a 'transposition of art… to take a work already created in one art and to express the same thing in another.'[34] This expands the possibilities: program music can tell its own story, and supplement that telling with a textual program note; or it can retell an existing story from another art form, in which case it no longer relies on a specially written program note but can simply point to the original work (a title is often sufficient).

Theoretically, any art can be translated into music: literature, drama, visual art, architecture, dance – even food.[35] And although my focus is on storytelling, it is worth noting that the 'program'[36] does not even have to be a story – few of Liszt's symphonic poems are of a strictly narrative character, as Roger Scruton points out when making a distinction between descriptive and narrative program music.[37] The subject of a composition may be static or dynamic (just as the theme in variation form can be either static or dynamic).

So we find that program music may be inspired by any artwork or none; its subject may be original or derivative; its content may be a fixed depiction (non-narrative) or a gradually unfolding story. The boundaries of program music are hard to define, but the key point is that the music is expressing something beyond itself – what Liszt calls the 'poetic idea'.

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[34] Brown, *Music and Literature*, 224.
[35] See my composition *Tiramisu* (Appendix 2) for an example of food-inspired narrative program music.
[36] There is some confusion over the definition of 'program', as it can refer to either the subject of the music (as here), or the text written to supplement it. From here on I will refer to the latter as a 'program note'.
[37] Scruton, Roger, 'Programme Music,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394.

For Liszt, this 'poetic idea' is to govern the unique form of each piece: 'All exclusively musical considerations, though they should not be neglected, have to be subordinated to the action of the given subject.'[38] Note how he refers to *action*, not just subject. It is not a matter of simply taking a piece of amorphous content and shoehorning it into the structure of your choice; the content – that is, the 'poetic idea', an entity existing beyond its manifestation in any particular artwork – comes with its own form. This is particularly true of narrative, which indeed loses all meaning without its form, its ordering of events.

Yet there is also the 'form' of the medium – the way that music projects its subject matter is necessarily different from that of any other art; it will have its own way of telling a story. Bound by its own unique properties and limitations, music is not as 'free' as we might suppose; it cannot simply copy and translate a form wholesale from another art, or from a narrative itself. The desire to convey narratives in music did not result in a complete overhaul of traditional forms in favour of episodic, through-composed structures attempting to imitate narrative flow. Instead, we find that the repertoire is full of stories that are somehow fitted into various adaptations of sonata form and other pre-existing schemas. Composers of program music quickly found that 'the old standardised forms of music which they had scornfully rejected as hindrances to free expression were at the same time great aids to effectiveness.'[39]

Interestingly, it is heterogeneous structures, particularly those built on permutation (like sonata form), that became the dominant vehicles of narrative in program music. It seems that homogeneous forms like 'variations on a theme' were seen as too repetitive for storytelling[40] – too repetitive to directly represent the diverse characters and events of a narrative.

This brings us back to *how* music tells its story. We cannot simply designate music as the 'form' and story as the 'content', because neither element can be reduced so simply. If narrative content is separated from its form, it is no longer narrative; and in music, the

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[38] Franz Liszt, quoted in Brown, *Music and Literature*, 226.
[39] Brown, *Music and Literature*, 228.
[40] Many have noted the unusually high rate of redundancy in music. Margulis (in *On Repeat*, 1) notes that our tolerance to repetition is far higher in music than in other arts, or indeed everyday social interactions. See also Gregory Lewis Karl, 'Structuralism and Musical Plot,' *Music Theory Spectrum* 19, no. 1 (1997): 27, https://doi.org/10.2307/745997.

distinction between form and content is notoriously difficult to draw.[41] This conflation of form and content is often seen as music's great strength, and is the reason for Walter Pater's famous saying: 'All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music'[42] '… Except for music,' adds Lydia Goehr.[43] Music moves us, and so we *feel* like it must have content that is more than mere sound, but whatever 'representational codes' it has lack specificity. This is fine when we are discussing abstract narrative structures, as described earlier, but it leaves us short when we want the determinate characters and places of a pre-existing narrative to be heard in the music. However clearly the music articulates the abstract narrative outline, 'character, setting, and motive either are indeterminate or must be supplemented in some manner,' according to Almén.[44] One might say that music has no clear nouns and no clear verbs; all we can agree on are the adverbs.[45]

So it is left to the title and program note to supplement the music, to specify the nouns and verbs, and (if necessary) draw attention to how the music represents them. And perhaps the clearest way to make these connections between music and word is on the level of the theme or motif – to have a small recurring segment of the music represent a specific agent or object in the narrative. This is the approach developed by Richard Wagner in his use of *leitmotifs* to represent specific characters, places, objects and even abstract concepts – in other words, the nouns of his story.[46] We also find it in sonata form, where the two contrasting themes involved in a drama of conflict and resolution can be readily identified with a protagonist and antagonist, or subject and object.

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[41] 'Music is the art in which form (broadly speaking) and content cannot be distinguished, the art in which the form is the "content".' Peter Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts: An Essay in Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 114.
[42] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010; first published 1873), 129. ProQuest.
[43] Lydia Goehr, '"All Art Constantly Aspires to the Condition of Music" – Except the Art of Music: Reviewing the Contest of the Sister Arts,' in *The Insistence of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy After Early Modernity*, ed. Paul A. Kottman (New York: Fordham University, 2017), 140, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1x76fts.9.
[44] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 14.
[45] Of course, it's not quite this simplistic – even if nouns and verbs cannot be directly represented, they can still be 'suggested' by the music. 'It may be that the relation between music and the gestures and expressions it induces us to hear in it is more properly one of *suggestion*, rather than *representation*.' Levinson, 'Music as Narrative and Drama', 431.
[46] Wagner was writing operas, not program music, but *leitmotif* as a system of representation has since been used much more broadly.

This kind of approach seems to rule out monothematic structures like variation form, because of the necessity (in most narratives) of representing more than one narrative agent. But there are other, subtler forms of representation that go beyond theme and motif. To explore these, I have kept to monothematic variation form in all the compositions of my portfolio, pushing myself to find different ways to convey a story.

Music can do many things; storytelling is but one of them. I do not want to imply that storytelling is music's only function, or most important function; but it is the function I have focused on in composing these pieces.

The compositions can therefore be regarded as 'program music'. I have unashamedly relied upon words to help bridge music's representational gap, both in the titles and program notes that I have provided for each work. The program notes are not 'source texts' or 'translations'; they are supplements designed to direct the listener's attention to a story beyond the music. The music is the storyteller, not the story. As I understand it, we are all in a narrative whether we like it or not.

1.4. Putting the music in context

There are countless examples of 'variations on a theme' and countless examples of 'musical storytelling'. One is a structural framework, the other a mode of expression – so they are not at all mutually exclusive, yet very rarely do the two concepts overlap strongly in the same piece. More often than not, one aspect is emphasized and the other downplayed.

If we allow for the addition of sung text, perhaps the best examples of an overlap can be found in certain musical settings of ballads. The literary form of the ballad lends itself to this treatment, having an innately repetitive underlying structure but requiring a sense of development in the unfolding of its plot. In music, this can be very effectively achieved with a kind of modified strophic form, in which the melody is more or less constant (to match the repetitive meter and rhyming scheme of the text) but the accompaniment changes with each verse to reflect the progress of the story. Fine examples of this include Charles Villiers Stanford's *La Belle Dame sans merci*, Percy Grainger's *Hard Hearted Barb'ra (H)Ellen* and Calvin Bowman's imaginative arrangement of Eric Bogle's *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*.

This kind of form seems to be much less suitable for storytelling on a larger scale; examples from opera tend to be isolated scenes (such as the 'inventions' in the final act of Berg's *Wozzeck*, or the ground bass of 'When I am laid' in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*) in which the narrative purpose of the music is little more than a crescendo of mounting tension (or perhaps an 'unravelling' in the case of Purcell's aria) within a larger plot. Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* offers an example that covers the course of an entire opera, but even here the variations are only a small part of the form, heard as interludes to the main narrative action of the opera's scenes.

In instrumental music, program music hardly ever uses variation form, and sets of variations are hardly ever programmatic. We may find 'musical narratives' (in Almén's sense of the term) in works from Bach's *Goldberg Variations* to Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, but the direct intention of 'storytelling' seems to be largely absent. There are a few programmatic variation form works in the repertoire, like Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, but they tend to have descriptive rather than narrative programs.

Perhaps the clearest (and best-known) exception to all this is Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote*, a musical telling of a pre-existing story cast as a set of orchestral variations. The episodic nature of the story and its focus on a single character placed in a multitude of contrasting settings makes it well-suited to traditional variation form,[47] and it is a good model for the kind of piece I thought I would end up writing when I started on this project. My own early setting of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*[48] has the same kind of episodic form, treating the variation structure rather freely, as well as exhibiting a similar tone and aesthetic to Strauss' piece.

However, perhaps on account of my Christian faith (which entails belief in a *metanarrative*),[49] I quickly became preoccupied, and indeed slightly obsessed, by the concept of *teleology*; instead of episodic, quixotic adventure stories, I wanted quests of single-minded, determined purpose, leading to a hidden but compelling goal. As my themes shortened into ostinatos and my variations became incremental and process-driven, I wondered if I was turning into a 'minimalist'.

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[47] Brown calls variation form the 'natural form' for this story: 'the musical structure reinforces the logical one'. Brown, *Music and Literature*, 227.
[48] See Appendix 1.
[49] You can tell by now that I am not a postmodernist.

Interestingly, minimalism (and its antecedents) has historically been associated with a *non*-teleological approach to form. For Wim Mertens, one of the first to analyse musical minimalism, the lack of teleology is a defining feature of the style.[50] For example, in the liner notes to his *Music in Twelve Parts*, Philip Glass recommends 'another mode of listening – one in which neither memory nor anticipation… have a place in sustaining the texture, quality or reality of the musical experience'.[51] Even the offshoots of minimalism (postminimalism, totalism, holy minimalism) seem to use repetition as a means of either dissolving or transcending a linear, teleological experience of time.

Most of the compositions in my portfolio display a number of minimalist qualities: repetition, additive processes, phase-shifting, steady beat, linear transformation and clearly audible structure.[52] Yet I intend for these features to enhance the storytelling, to help convey a narrative to the listener. Could I be undermining my own intentions by using minimalist procedures?

Elizabeth Margulis points out that extended musical repetition can trigger either an expectation for change or an expectation for more repetition.[53] Most minimalist music aims for the latter, encouraging the listener to 'give up' their anticipation of a future goal and to submit to an almost timeless musical present. But by suggesting a *narrative* in the presentation of my music, I hope to achieve the former; that is, with increasing repetition should come increasing anticipation, because the listener knows that there is a 'story' to the work and that there must be change in order for the story to reach its goal.

One particular minimalist quality mentioned above – audible structure[54] – is key. The process of the music needs to be transparent, obvious even, so that the listener can hear the pattern and the direction in which it seems to be heading. The consistent,

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[50] Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, 1st paperback ed. (London: Kahn & Averill, 1988), 16–17.
[51] Quoted in Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 79.
[52] These are characteristics of minimalism as defined by Kyle Gann, 'Minimal Music Defined', in 'Minimal Music, Maximal Impact,' *New Music Box* (1 November 2001), https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/minimal-music-maximal-impact/.
[53] Margulis, *On Repeat*, 24.
[54] Gann uses this characteristic to differentiate early minimalism (up to 1980) from its later forms and antecedent genres (like postminimalism) which usually seek to make their structural processes less obvious to the listener. Gann, 'Minimal Music, Maximal Impact'.

incremental variations of the repeating theme point toward a logical conclusion, or a goal, and narrative action can be achieved by delaying or subverting that goal.[55]

But at the same time, I'm attracted by other characteristics of repetitive music that many minimalist composers *do* affirm: its meditative quality, the intense focus it both suggests and provokes, its clarity and straightforwardness. A recognisable, predictable pattern (even the jarring contrasts of *Catcher Variations* become predictable after a while) helps the listener to settle into the music, to inhabit it, instead of hearing it as though from a distance, as an outsider.[56] In this way, I hope to encourage a kind of 'participation' in the stories of the music.

This original approach to variation form unites the teleological implications of process and development with the intensely subjective experience created by the repetitive nature of minimalism. What Elizabeth Margulis might consider as opposing elements can become one:

> Development asks us to follow a narrative set up by the music; repetition asks us to embody it. Development asks us to watch a story that's out there in the world; repetition asks us to enter a particular subjectivity.[57]

[55] 'Many narratives can be viewed as spaces stretching between a question and its answer and their unfolding is partly characterized by the kinds of delays they bring to the answering of the question.' Gerald Prince, *Narratology: the Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 113.
[56] 'The pleasure we derive from musical repetitions might stem… from a growing sense of inhabiting the music: a transportive, even transcendent kind of experience.' Margulis, *On Repeat*, 14–15.
[57] Margulis, *On Repeat*, 148.

2. Framework for Analysis

2.1. Starting with the narrative

Each composition in the portfolio has a narrative behind it, and because my focus is on musical storytelling, this is the logical place for an analysis to begin.[1] As for my secondary concern, the use of variation form, this should be considered primarily in terms of how it conveys a narrative, and not as an independent aspect of the music. As Edward T. Cone says, 'The aim of music is to provide intense experiences, not structures for contemplation.'[2] Christopher Small takes a similar view:

> One does not read a novel in order to admire its formal perfection, nor, one hopes, do novelists write in order to be thus admired. Similarly, no sensible musician will strive to make his work conform to those after-the-event models of 'formal perfection' but will look instead for ways in which to make his drama more effective and evoke maximum response from his listeners. What is called formal perfection is the product of that dramatic effectiveness, not the source of it.[3]

In my case, the original source of the 'dramatic effectiveness' is the story; but just like the folktale of oral tradition, the story only becomes truly 'dramatic' when it is brought to life. There are three possible roles in this process, corresponding to the three distinct roles that Aaron Shepard distinguishes in the retelling of folktales: Storyteller, Folklorist and Author.[4] The Storyteller is the Performer, through whom the music speaks, and who will tell the story in their own unique way, slightly differently each time depending on the context. Their source text is a particular telling of the story by an Author – in this case, the Composer. And the Folklorist, who wants to go behind the scenes and understand the way the story works, corresponds to the Researcher, or the writer (and reader) of this exegesis.

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[1] This does not necessarily reflect the process by which the music was composed. In many cases, I did not know what story the music was telling until I had almost finished writing it. That is not to say that the narrative is an 'add-on', just that it was felt intuitively and took time to find expression in words.

[2] Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 146–147.

[3] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 162–163.

[4] Aaron Shepard, 'The Art of Retelling,' *Aaron Shepard's Storytelling Page* (1995), http://www.aaronshep.com/storytelling/A62.html.

The narratives in the portfolio range in their specificity (or 'tangibility') from the pre-existing, complex story of a novel to the barely suggested narrative of a simple metaphor. None of them are wholly abstract or solely 'musical' narratives, because in each case the musical work includes text (a program note, or at least a title). Yet because these texts supplement the music (not the other way around), the narratives are also never quite as determinate as a literary narrative.

The narratives themselves can be classified in many different ways, but I shall primarily explore them in relation to the narrative archetypes of Northrop Frye (adapted by Liszka and Almén) and the Seven Basic Plots of Christopher Booker.

Booker categorises narratives into seven essential types:

1. Overcoming the Monster
2. Rags to Riches
3. The Quest
4. Voyage and Return
5. Comedy
6. Tragedy
7. Rebirth[5]

Because of their familiarity (the types are fairly self-explanatory), these seven plots provide good models on which to begin a narrative analysis. Each plot has its own distinctive teleology, easily recognised and understood. But, being centred in each case around the actions of a clearly-defined protagonist, they rely heavily on a literary understanding of narrative. To understand how a story can be told at the musical level, a 'deeper' model of narrative is required.

2.2. Removing the words

A more fundamental understanding of narrative action is provided by Frye's four *mythoi* ('generic plots').[6] These four categories blend into one another in a circle encompassing all kinds of narratives, corresponding to the cycle of the four seasons: the world of Innocence (Summer) is Romance; the downward motion of the Tragedy

[5] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum International, 2004).
[6] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 158–239.

(Autumn) takes us from Innocence to Experience; the world of Experience (Winter) is Irony or Satire; the upward motion of Comedy (Spring) takes us back from Experience to Innocence.[7] Liszka, who understands narrative in terms of transvaluation, defines Frye's four *mythoi* in terms of a tension between the order of a hierarchy and the possibility of its transgression[8] (or 'disruption').[9]

Almén finds this a useful approach to a theory of musical narrative,[10] because this understanding of narrative requires no words, and no 'representation' of anything more specific than Order and Transgression (a dichotomy that immediately suggests to me a correspondence with Theme and Variations) and a sense of either Victory or Defeat.[11] In these terms, Frye's four *mythoi* can be understood as follows:

- Romance: victory of an order-imposing hierarchy over a transgression.
- Tragedy: defeat of a transgression by an order-imposing hierarchy.
- Irony: defeat of an order-imposing hierarchy by a transgression.
- Comedy: victory of a transgression over an order-imposing hierarchy.[12]

This model provides a good starting point for 'removing the words' from a narrative and understanding its underlying trajectory. Because music is dynamic and largely non-representational, its stories are more helpfully viewed as action rather than information: 'Musical gestures tend to be much more a doing of something than a saying of things about something.'[13] The tension between Victory and Defeat, Order and Transgression, underlies the overall shape and direction of a narrative, and can be effectively rendered in musical form.

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[7] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 162.
[8] James Jakób Liszka, *The Semiotic of Myth: A Critical Study of the Symbol* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 15.
[9] 'The four mythoi are, in fact, the four basic strategies used by fantasy, by the narrative imagination, in playing out the tensions between the violence of a hierarchy that imposes order and the violence that results from its transgression.' Liszka, *Semiotic of Myth*, 133.
[10] Almén, preface to *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), ix–x.
[11] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 65.
[12] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 66.
[13] Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 19.

Storytelling at this level does not depend on the representation of any determinate agents or events.[14] Although my desire is to engage in storytelling at a higher level than this, with at least the *suggestion* of determinate characters and events, I also want the narrative arc of the music to be clearly discernible without reference to text.

2.3. Mapping it onto variation form

Now that the basic structure of the story is clear, how can it be carried by variation form? What type or adaptation of variation form is best able to convey the narrative? As I have noted, I have not approached this project with a view to staying 'true' to variation form, but have sought to explore how its key elements – particularly monothematicism and cellular structure – can be used most effectively in musical storytelling. The results are not necessarily recognisable as traditional variation form.

I am particularly interested in how variation form can express the teleology of a story. A sense of linear progression or goal-directedness is not an essential feature of variation form as it is often encountered. Stephen Hough has noted that variation form tends to be more about the journey than the destination,[15] because there is no clearly perceived end-point to elaboration, and no self-evident conflict to be resolved (as there is in sonata form). Yet there are also many examples of variation form that *do* have a strong sense of purpose and narrative momentum – often in pieces of ostensibly 'absolute' music. How can variation form be made to convey a dramatic teleology like this while retaining its essentially repetitive nature?

2.4. The role of the theme

Every piece in the portfolio is built around a single musical theme, but the role of the theme in the storytelling changes from piece to piece. At one level, the theme may directly correspond to a particular element of the narrative (its subject or object, for example); at a deeper level, the theme may stand for the 'established order' (as in Liszka's framework of Order and Transgression); or a theme may have no obvious representational function at all, and simply exist to connect the episodic events of the musical form into a unified story.

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[14] Gregory Lewis Karl, 'Music as Plot: A Study in Cyclic Forms,' PhD dissertation (University of Cincinnati, 1993), 100–101.
[15] Stephen Hough, 'On the Art of Variation,' *The Guardian* (5 July 2013), https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/jul/05/how-paganini-became-pop.

Interestingly, despite its popularity, direct thematic representation does not seem to fit with how we intuitively hear music, even when listening to it as a narrative. Nattiez points to a 1974 experiment in which Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* was played to a group of children, who were told that the music portrayed a narrative, but were not given any clues (like the title) as to what the narrative was about. Each child was asked to construct their own narrative after listening to the piece, and Nattiez notes from the responses that 'in general, thematic identification is weak: the narratives do not seem to attribute to a person a characterizing theme.'[16]

But in variation form, the theme is bound to be more explicit – whatever ambiguity may remain about its representational function – because it is presented as a discrete, self-contained unit. The theme is what gives a musical work its identity.[17] It may be original to the work, or it may already exist as a separate entity, bringing to the new work a host of connotations and potential meanings from its previous use.

Typically, and disregarding any obviously preparatory material, the theme is heard at the beginning of a work, particularly in a set of variations on a theme. But this doesn't have to be the case, and there are several examples of 'reverse' variation form in which variations precede the theme (Britten's *Nocturnal for Guitar after John Dowland*, David Stanhope's *Concerto for Band*).[18] Listeners will usually assume that what they hear at the beginning is the 'theme', but it may be perceived (immediately or retrospectively) as incomplete or obscured, itself a variation, impelling a search for the true generative theme. This can be a powerful way to suggest narrative teleology, and I explore it in several works.

2.5. The process of the variations

Essentially, a narrative approach to variation form requires the variations to be logically connected to one another in some way. 'Plot is a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.'[19] Even if the variations appear to be independently derived from

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[16] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?' trans. Katharine Ellis, *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association* 115, no. 2 (1990): 248, https://www.jstor.org/stable/766438.
[17] William Drabkin, 'Theme,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27789.
[18] My composition *Tiramisu* can also be understood this way – see Appendix 2.
[19] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; first published by Arnold, 1926), 130.

the theme, an underlying sense of progression or development between them is necessary if we are to hear narrative flow in the music.

Because we are naturally on the lookout for causality (particularly when using a narrative listening strategy), this can be achieved through subtle means. In narrative, according to Gerald Prince, 'if one event follows another event in time and is (plausibly) relatable to it, the second event is taken to be caused by the first unless the narrative specifies otherwise.'[20] A similar implicit causality can become apparent in variation form, and not just between the theme and its variations. Jeffrey Swinkin points out how easily a variation can itself become a quasi-theme for subsequent variations:

> When a variation, in the process of exemplifying a thematic feature, yields a secondary, nonstructural one, it not only creates a source of contrastive reference to the theme but, additionally, creates a feature through which subsequent variations may potentially refer back to it. In this way, certain variations assume a quasi-thematic status relative to other variations by introducing the features via which those variations will refer. Such a thematic variation will be at once a variation of the theme as well as a 'theme' relative to subsequent variations; a non-thematic variation will be at once a variation of the theme as well as of a thematic variation. In this way, most variations within a set assume a dual function.[21]

Following this approach, the original theme can be gradually deconstructed into several contrasting elements, as emphasised by different variations, and the conflict between those elements can be a source of narrative drama. I use this approach in the *Catcher Variations*.

Of course, this undermines the monothematicism of the form; in the remaining music of the portfolio I seek to keep the thematic unit intact, making the variations as repetitive and homogeneous as possible. To do this, I use incremental variations of the same kind (e.g. rhythmic diminution) to create linear development across the variations. While this minimises the available contrast (not to mention the possibility for narrative plot reversals), it focuses the narrative to a single clear direction and implies a goal or end-point to which the process is heading. A strict process can also effectively mimic

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[20] Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), s.v. 'causality'.
[21] Jeffrey Swinkin, 'Reference and Schenkerian Structure: Toward a Theory of Variation,' *Indiana Theory Review* 25 (2004): 212, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045285.

causality, as each variation becomes the next logical step in the continuation of the process.

There is room for further exploration in this area. Many have questioned music's ability to depict causality,[22] but if a logical process of incremental variation can be clearly established, this would seem to create a very clear chain of related events. If we treat that chain of events as the chronology of the narrative, could it be strong enough to remain discernible even if the musical discourse presents the events in a different order? I see in this a potential for music to mimic the two levels of literary narrative: the Fabula (the underlying chronological sequence of events) and the Plot (the arrangement of those events in the narrative discourse).[23] I have not explored this possibility in the portfolio, but may do so in future compositions.

2.6. Finding the end

There must be more than a logical progression between the variations; there must also be a goal, a question that wants an answer, 'an enigma to be solved'[24]. The variations may be perceived as paths toward the goal, obstructions to the goal, or both. But whether the goal is clear or hidden, constant or changing, an end must be reached. Karol Berger explains that this is what makes a musical form *linear*, as opposed to cyclic or static:

> The ending is the essential function within the temporal form because with it the form gets its 'point', its goal. All the implications of earlier phases are finally explicitly realised, and thus the phases, whose relationship to one another might until then have been unclear, are now integrated into the whole.[25]

The end is vital to a narrative understanding of a piece of music. Thus the ideal process for the variations is one that implies an end-point; an open-ended process implies eternity and can only be cut off arbitrarily. So the process-driven pieces in my portfolio either travel toward a reachable singularity (as in the diminution of *Going on a Lion*

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[22] See Jerrold Levinson, 'Music as Narrative and Music as Drama,' *Mind and Language* 19 no. 4 (2004): 429, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0268-1064.2004.00267.x.

[23] This distinction makes possible a number of different chronological deviations in literature (eg. retroversion and anticipation) – see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 81–98.

[24] Gerald Prince, *Narratology: the Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 106–107.

[25] Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 181.

Hunt toward the theme's smallest rhythmic cell) or are limited by a finite structural frame (as in the fixed 12-bar form of *Over the Hills and Far Away*).

These devices set up the necessity for an ending and anticipate when it will occur without giving away exactly what it will be. Importantly, the expectation or desire created by the narrative progression need not be fulfilled, and may lead to confusion or dismay rather than triumph.[26] Almén warns that 'recognizing that narratives may resolve undesirably or not resolve at all is as crucial to musical narrative theory as it is to literary narrative theory'.[27] The function of the end – whether we hear it as victory or defeat, and how that fits with our expectations and desires – is key to understanding the narrative.

2.7. Encouraging a narrative listening strategy

The Researcher has analysed the story; the Composer has written it into the music; the Performer has told the story by playing the music. But will the listener hear a narrative?

Music has many functions and can be listened to in many different ways.[28] A narrative will only be apparent if the listener has adopted the right 'listening strategy'.[29] Nattiez argues that a 'verbal cue' is required for this[30] – a position that Almén refutes, maintaining that nonverbal cues may also suggest an underlying narrative to the music.[31] Nevertheless, the 'verbal cue' demanded by Nattiez seems like a sensible and easy way to ensure that the listener is at least aware of the *possibility* of hearing a narrative in the music.

The simplest verbal cue is the title, which can either refer to a known story (such as Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote*) or suggest an original one (such as Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*). Even if the title suggests nothing more specific than the act of storytelling itself (such as Andrew Schultz's *Once upon a time* or Elena Kats-Chernin's *Mythic*), this can strongly encourage the listener to adopt a narrative listening strategy.

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[26] Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 240.
[27] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 22.
[28] 'It would be presumptuous to claim that music is universally a narrative phenomenon.' Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 32.
[29] Nattiez, 'Narrativity in Music?', 242. For Nattiez, it is the listener who 'constructs' the narrative; I hold that the narrative is already there, behind the music, and is 're-constructed' by the listener.
[30] Nattiez, 'Narrativity in Music?', 242.
[31] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 29.

But my main interest here lies in the use of program notes, which are now a well-established part of art music performance practice. Composers are often expected to provide program notes for their own works, and many do so grudgingly, not wanting words to get 'in the way' of the music. There is an understandable concern here to let the music speak for itself, summed up well by Robert Schumann's oft-quoted response to program notes: 'If a composer holds up a program to us before the music, I say: "First of all let us hear that you made beautiful music; afterwards we shall be glad of your program."'[32]

Some object to program notes on the grounds that each listener should be left to listen to a piece of music in their own way and to construct their own meaning from it. 'Is one analysis more *true* than others; is there truth in analysis?' asks Nattiez,[33] implying that stories are no more than subjective constructions of meaning, unique to each individual. Even if the composer *intends* for a specific narrative to be related in the music, many doubt that this intended meaning can really be considered intrinsic to the piece. Philip Ball says that to imply the composer's program note is the 'key' to understanding a piece of music is to misunderstand music altogether: 'Does that mean that, if we lack the inside information, we are deriving only false or faulty satisfaction from the music?'[34]

Liszt would have no hesitation in answering 'Yes' to that question, and I am happy to join him. Liszt firmly believed that the meaning of a piece was not generated by the listener – or by the program note, which he defined thus:

> [A] preface added to a piece of instrumental music, by means of which the composer intends to guard the listener against a wrong poetical interpretation, and to direct his attention to the poetical idea of the whole or to a particular part of it.[35]

I find it very interesting that Liszt implies a 'right poetical interpretation' that is not dependent on text. Words may point a listener toward a narrative mode of listening,

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[32] Robert Schumann, quoted in Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948), 244.
[33] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 202.
[34] Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct: How Music Works and Why We Can't Do Without It* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), 390.
[35] Liszt, quoted in Roger Scruton, 'Programme Music,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394.

toward a specific story even, but they are no more than a signpost. The music does the storytelling.

This is how I see the role of my program notes: they are an integral part of the compositions, in that without them the music is likely to be misunderstood or not fully appreciated. But far from shutting down the listener's interpretative instinct, good program notes open it up by suggesting that *there is something there to be interpreted*. Edward Cone describes this well:

> Words… do not limit the potential of music; rather, by specification and exemplification, they may render it more easily comprehensible… A program can specify a general mood to be associated with the movement of the music, or it can follow – or direct – the course of the music more closely through the succession of sounds, actions, tensions, and relaxations that its narrative suggests. The effectiveness of a program depends on the degree to which it is felt to be figuratively isomorphic with the form of the composition – the extent to which the pattern of activity suggested by the program corresponds to the pattern of symbolic gestures created by the music. Naturally, the less detailed the program is, the easier it is for the listener to imagine such correspondence.[36]

I have taken this approach to my program notes. They elucidate an evocative setting or framework for the narrative, but they leave the narrative action – and, importantly, the ending – to the music. This enables the listener to engage more deeply in the story, because it leaves intact the 'what comes next?' excitement that is at the heart of storytelling.[37] 'The one imperative of storytelling is that the audience must long to know what happened next.'[38] Program notes are not a replacement for the music; they should aim to give the listener a deeper, richer experience – of the *music*, and the story the *music* tells.

> The best one can hope to do with words is suggest ways in which we might begin to understand the experience. The understanding itself can come only from the musicking itself.[39]

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[36] Cone, *Composer's Voice*, 166.
[37] Small, *Musicking*, 166–167.
[38] Dan Yashinsky, *Suddenly They Heard Footsteps: Storytelling for the Twenty-first Century* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 160.
[39] Small, *Musicking*, 184–185.

3. Simple narratives of growth and change

3.1. *Teklanika Twilight*

The simplest definition of narrative I have come across is: 'A time-bound linear form that can be heard, watched or read.'[1] Time passes, something happens. The plot can be drawn as a single line, a journey from situation A to situation B.

The story of *Teklanika Twilight* can be understood on this level. Primarily it is about a glacial braided river in Denali National Park, Alaska. Over several days of summer rain and warm weather it grows in volume (physical and acoustic), so there is a gradual change from situation A to situation B. But it is still the same river.

There is also a secondary level to the story: my personal experience of the river, and in particular a midnight walk to see it one final time before leaving Denali. This provides an eerie, twilit 'setting' for the primary level of the narrative (perhaps framing it as a 'memory' within the secondary level) as well as an ending (leaving the river behind) for what would otherwise be an everlasting story.

So we have a single element (the river) that is continuously 'flowing' (repeating) but gradually changing and growing over time. This maps readily onto passacaglia form,[2] with the continuous cycle of a 13-note tonic-requiring[3] passacaglia theme evoking the constant, ever-flowing river,[4] and the major-minor ambiguity reflecting the half-light of the setting. The endless cycle is abandoned rather than finished, left to fade into the distance.

The theme, established clearly at the beginning, is ever-present; but in a process of 'free absorption'[5] it is gradually relegated to the background – much like the sound of the river. The increasingly active counterpoint tells of the quickening stream of water. At

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[1] Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 16.
[2] I'm going with the Encyclopaedia Brittanica definition of passacaglia, which suggests a subtle difference between this and chaconne, a passacaglia ostinato being primarily melodic, and a chaconne ostinato being primarily harmonic or bass-driven. Encyclopaedia Brittanica, s.v. 'Passacaglia' (published online 20 July 2012), https://www.britannica.com/art/passacaglia-musical-form-and-dance.
[3] See Elaine Sisman, 'Variations,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29050.
[4] The Teklanika is not technically 'ever-flowing' because it freezes over every winter, but I wasn't there to see that!
[5] Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 84.

bar 50 the theme is foregrounded again, and is incrementally transformed into its own double-tempo countermelody (the start of each unit is also anticipated slightly to add to the momentum). The original theme returns (in its original tempo) at bar 87 under the new countermelody. The circular effect of this passage reinforces the river's continuity.

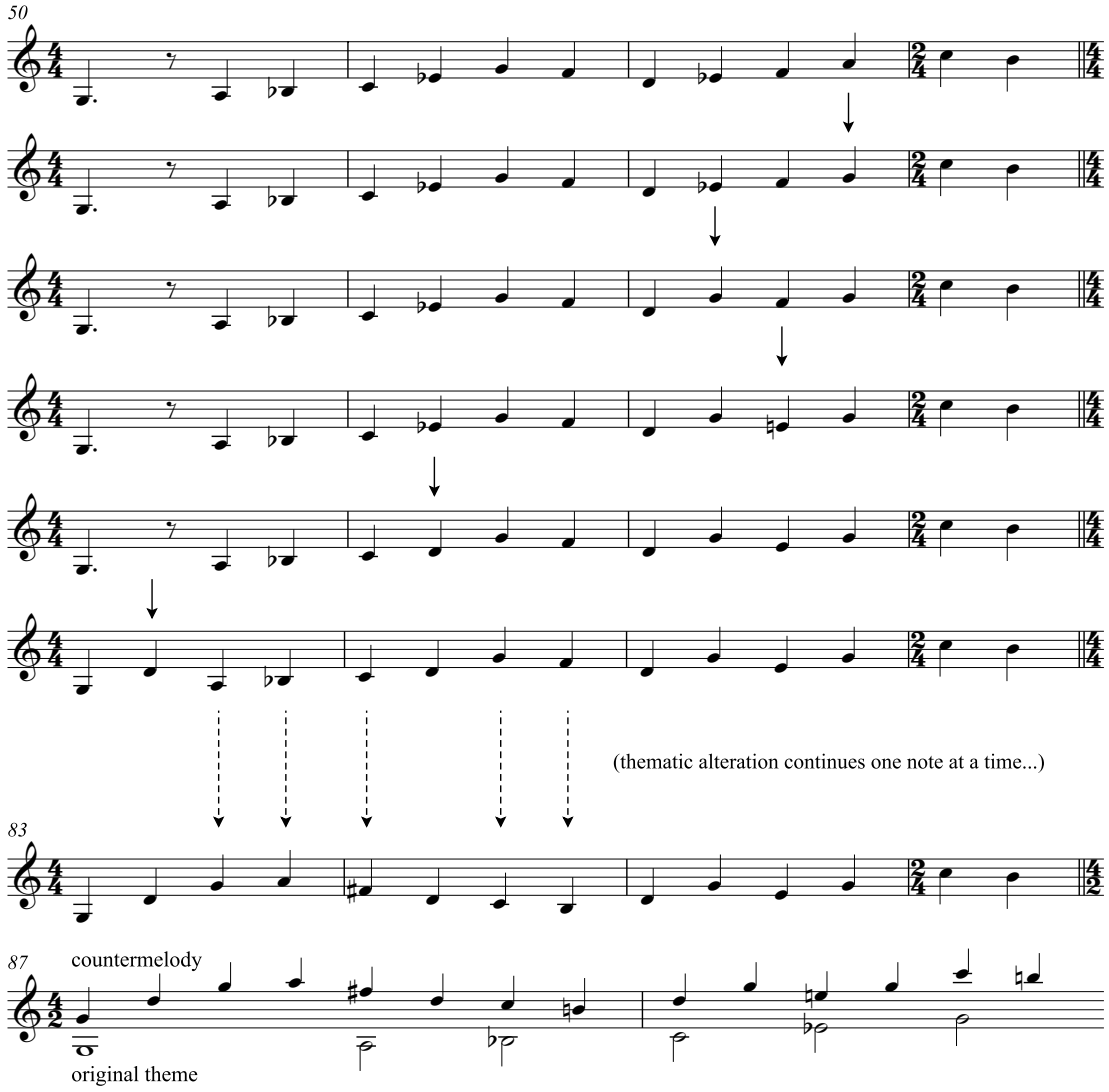

Figure 3.1: Incremental thematic transformation in *Teklanika Twilight*.[6]

Just as I was suddenly much more aware of the river during my last night in Denali, at the end of the piece the theme comes back to the foreground. Then it is gradually 'left behind', losing every second note in the alto flute's final two renditions (bars 116–123) and last heard on the more ephemeral-sounding glockenspiel.

[6] In the score, the last few units before bar 87 are actually transposed into a different key to enhance the effect of a 'return' – here I've notated everything as it would be if left in the original key.

The program note simply tells of my personal experience of the Teklanika River. It is left to the listener to connect this written account with what they hear in the music.

3.2. *The Imaginary Waltz*

> The point of narratives isn't simply to record a dramatic tale, making normal life… seem boring and uneventful in comparison. The point of narrative is to imagine one path for returning a broken segment of the world to wholeness. Narratives are, in their most basic sense, a way of experimenting with human lives to see if they can be restored to stasis, to the mundane.[7]

We are all, in many ways, inept. One of my ineptitudes is dancing, which can be taken as a metaphor for all kinds of faults and brokenness. If you add a single beat to a waltz, you are immediately out of step with your partner. The dance is ruined… unless you have a gracious partner who is patient and skillful enough to bring you back in step, weaving your mistakes into a new pattern, creating a beautiful new dance.

This story is a journey to restore a broken situation to wholeness – not to destroy it or ignore it, but to redeem it. It is a metaphor for the abundant grace of God, who (in my experience) works wonders through the silliest of mistakes in seemingly mundane and ordinary lives.

To tell this story, the music must reconcile two elements – a broken Subject and a good Order – without one seeming to 'defeat' the other. This would be a Comedy in Booker's terms ('not unlike a jigsaw puzzle'[8]), and somewhere near the intersection of Comedy and Romance in Frye's model (our sympathy is with what Liszka would call the 'transgressing' agent, but we also recognise the Transgression, not the Order, as the problem).

Thus there are two agents, and these are essentially represented by the two hands of the piano player (and two different pianos in the toy piano version). The first agent – the melody in the treble – shows itself as 'broken' in the way it skips a beat, then gains an extra one. It also proves unable to fix itself – the piece can be heard as a series of

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[7] Jessica Ann Hughes, 'The End of Narrative,' *Wondering Fair* (7 May 2015), https://wonderingfair.com/2015/05/07/the-end-of-narrative/.
[8] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum International, 2004), 116.

'constant melody' variations[9] (with substantial interludes) in which the melody always 'slips up' in the same place – it is the accompaniment, not the melody, that varies.

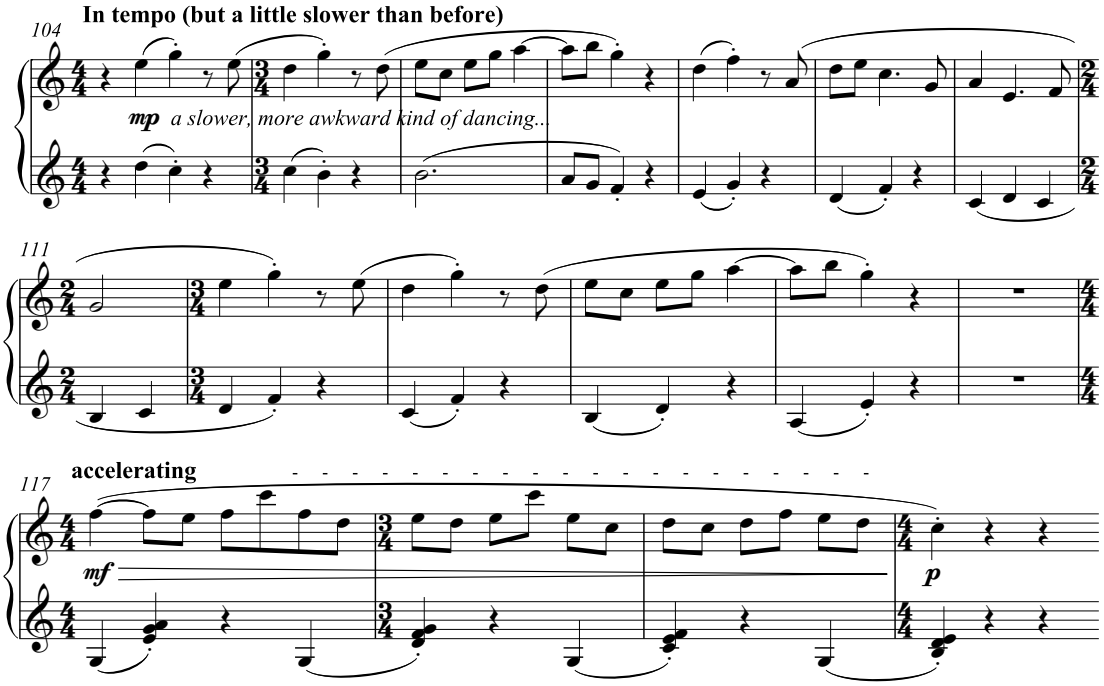

Figure 3.2: Final variation in *The Imaginary Waltz*. The two parts reach rhythmic alignment.

The 'mistakes' of the right hand do not disappear, but the left hand part works with them and dances *through* them to complete a pleasant little 'imaginary' waltz. The hesitations throughout the piece, and especially at the end, can be interpreted as shyness in the face of such grace.

Because this is such a little, light piece, I wanted to keep the program note as short as possible. After explaining the circumstances of its composition, one sentence points out the musical conflict between the two agents and a second suggests the dancing metaphor.

3.3. *Yukon Sunrise*

There is a fine distinction between narrative program music and descriptive program music.[10, 11] Although a sunrise takes time (and implies growth and change), it is really

[9] Timothy Rhys Jones, 'Variation Form,' in *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011), http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e7067.
[10] Roger Scruton, 'Programme Music,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394.
[11] Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948), 241.

just a single event, which would disqualify it as a narrative.[12] But add an Observer (personal subject), a Creator (personal object) and Mosquitoes (villains? helpers?), and there might be something more going on…

I wrote a poem about a sunrise I experienced in Alaska in 2016. On one level, the sun came up and it was beautiful. On another level, I gradually became aware of a tension between the 'free gift' of the sunrise and the 'cost' of all that beauty – that the birds were fed and the flowers were pollinated, at least in part, by the mosquitoes I was swatting on my arm. To ignore the mosquitoes (which was, at the time, impossible!) would be to remove the experience from real life and put it into some kind of ethereal realm of disembodied imagination. But the whole point of the story is that I was woken up, not put to sleep.[13]

It would be stretching the definition to breaking point to claim that this piece is in 'variation form'. The most that can be said is that it borrows variation form's cellular structure and monothematicism – although I hesitate to call contrary motion scales in sixths a 'theme'.

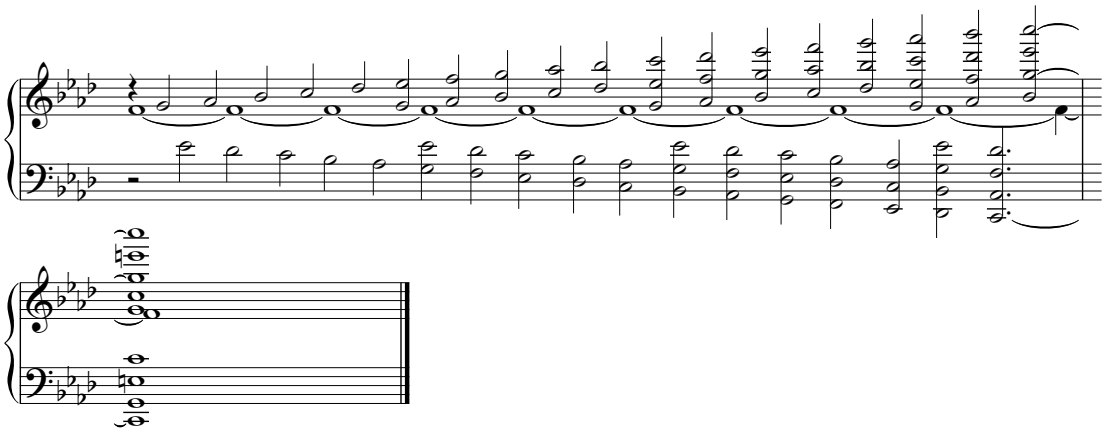

Figure 3.3: Harmonic outline of *Yukon Sunrise* (essentially every note of the piece!).

The music does not really tell a story; the intent is to recreate (or perhaps only mimic[14]) an experience for the listener. The tempo is slow and there is no significant activity (the

[12] 'Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other.' Gerald Prince, *Narratology: the Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 4.
[13] Yes, I mean that metaphorically as well.
[14] Martin Bresnick (in conversation with me, 15 June 2018) considered this piece 'problematic' because it functions almost wholly at the level of mimesis rather than diegesis – an astute observation. Perhaps I am leaving too much to the listener?

mosquito sounds in bars 20–32 are the only slightly unexpected diversion). One does not hear a pulse, and so the exact placement of each chord change is hard to anticipate. There is a discernible pattern of gradual expansion, but no clear goal or object. The 'arrival' at the C major chord of bar 113 is welcome but slightly arbitrary.[15]

All of this is deliberate; the piece is intended as a kind of background soundscape for contemplation. The repetitive form aims at 'goal demotion', focusing the listener's attention on the present moment and the sound itself.[16] If you look forward to the end of a sunrise, you're kind of missing the point.

But at the end there is something caught in that final C major chord – an F, the first note of the piece, now heard as an annoying mosquito buzz (played on trumpet mouthpieces) which will not go away. The dream snaps to reality with a handclap (killing the mosquito). Audiences seem somewhat bemused by this, unsure if they're allowed (or meant) to laugh – which I love. They've been startled into wakefulness, just as I was. The sunrise is over and there's blood on your arm.

There are two program notes. The original poem (which was written before the music, and served as a kind of framework for the composition) can be seen as a kind of parallel artwork, a telling of the same 'story' in a different medium. The more conventional program note gives background information on the experience that inspired the composition, but makes no attempt at connecting these things with the music itself – in fact, the music is not described at all. Because the piece is so mimetic (e.g. buzzing brass sounds for mosquitoes), the connections suggest themselves.

I admit that the effectiveness of this piece is open to criticism, as it seems to occupy some weird, unlikely aesthetic territory halfway between the vivid sunrise depiction that opens Ferde Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite* and the slow, subtle, mono-directional process of something like John Luther Adams' *Clouds of Forgetting, Clouds of Unknowing* (gradual expansion) or David Lang's[17] *The Passing Measures* (gradual falling) – pieces that are worlds apart. It's too 'flat' to give the thrill of Grofé's programmatic piece, but too short to create the immersive, meditative experience of

[15] The peak of all the different-length crescendos phases into alignment every 30 bars (at 17, 47, 77 and 107) to create subtle arrival points; the end deliberately misses these.
[16] Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58.
[17] I mean the American David Lang, not myself.

Adams or Lang. But in my defence, there's meant to be something disarmingly 'ordinary' about the piece. After all, it's telling a true story.

4. Theme as Subject: the hero's quest

4.1. *Going on a Lion Hunt*

> The theatre is about the hero journey, the hero and the heroine are those people who do not give in to temptation. The hero story is about a person undergoing a test that he or she didn't choose.[1]

Variation form is focused on a single subject: the theme. When the music is understood as a narrative, it is natural to interpret the subject – the ever-present theme – as the story's protagonist. This makes variation form well-suited to what Rick Altman calls 'single-focus narratives'[2] in which an individual plays the lead role. Rather than a balance-of-power narrative between several characters or groups, the focus is on the decisions and desires of a lone character struggling to act freely in a hostile world.

Add to this the repetitive, segmented structure of variation form, and we have a theme/subject (the protagonist) being put through a succession of 'trials'. The variations threaten the identity and purpose of the theme, but finally the subject emerges from these 'trials' having attained some new quality – it is stronger, more clearly defined, more complete. This is the kind of story – the 'Adventure of the Hero' – that Joseph Campbell outlines in his search for a universal 'monomyth':

> The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed – again, again, and again.[3]

Wanting to tell a story of perseverance, I turned to a repetitive, rhythmically chanted folktale that I remembered from childhood. It has been popularized in several children's picture books, and is best known as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*[4] or *We're Going on a Lion Hunt*.[5] Michael Rosen, author of its most successful iteration, attributes the story to

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[1] David Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (London: Methuen, 2002), 14.
[2] Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 119–190.
[3] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato: New World Library, 2008; first published by Pantheon, 1949), 90.
[4] Michael Rosen, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury (London: Walker Books, 1989).
[5] David Axtell, *We're Going on a Lion Hunt* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

'a folk song that circulated around American summer camps, sometimes with a lion instead of a bear,' which he first heard in the late 1970s.[6]

Ostensibly, the story is focused on an Object (the lion/bear of the title), but in fact the highly-anticipated ending turns out to be of little significance and varies quite considerably between versions; the story's true focus is on the rising fear, courage and determination of the Subject. The subject encounters a succession of obstacles on the journey and must resolve to go 'through' them in order to continue. The story is told through a repeating refrain with only the nature of the obstacle changing from verse to verse. The predictability of this structure (which lends itself to audience participation) enables the listener to identify strongly with the subject; the effect is somewhat musical. I was keen to emulate this structure, because I think the effectiveness of the story can be attributed in large part to the close connection it establishes between subject and audience: 'The deepest secret of the teller's art: *the listener is the hero of the story*…'[7]

This story fits with Booker's 'Overcoming the Monster' plot, which he calls 'the most basic of all the plots because it focuses attention on this conflict with the dark power to the exclusion of almost everything else.'[8] It can be mapped onto variation form in a straightforward way: the subject (or hero) is embodied by the theme, and the conflict with the 'dark power' is the process of the variations that threaten to pull the theme apart.

The theme is more of a rhythm and a contour than an actual melody. It is in two parts, a 'body' and a 'tail', which both have rapid shifts between simple and compound time.

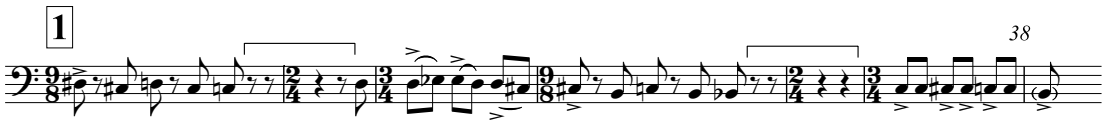

Figure 4.1: Thematic body of *Going on a Lion Hunt*.

[6] Rosen, quoted in 'How we made: Helen Oxenbury and Michael Rosen on We're Going on a Bear Hunt', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/nov/05/how-we-made-bear-hunt.
[7] Dan Yashinsky, *Suddenly They Heard Footsteps: Storytelling for the Twenty-first Century* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 28.
[8] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum International, 2004), 219.

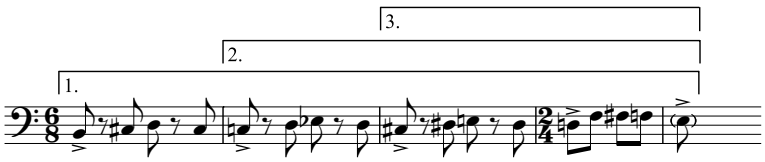

Figure 4.2: Thematic tail of *Going on a Lion Hunt*.

The pitch intervals between each note are variable. The duration of the rests between phrases in the thematic body (indicated by brackets) are variable. The thematic tail alternates between four-, three- and two-bar phrases.

Actually, there is no definitive theme, at least not as a standalone unit; we only encounter the theme through its variations. Yet the variations are little more than reiterations of the theme; the scope of variable elements is extremely small, in part because of the lack of any real ‘accompaniment’. The process that connects the variations is unpredictable, rendering the theme inherently unstable; it is always there, but always moving. The subject is never at rest.

The ensemble is divided into three equal-sized groups, spatially separated, so that it sounds like the theme is constantly moving around the stage. The variation units (indicated in the score by the rehearsal numbers) do not align with the length of the thematic unit being varied: at first they are longer, and so we get ‘unfinished’ variations filling in the gaps; later they are too short, and so the variations begin to overlap with one another. This formal instability, combined with the spatially ‘split’ ensemble, creates the effect of ongoing, jarring interruptions.

Although the exact process is unpredictable (I plotted it from a graph drawn freehand), there is an overall progression toward shorter and quicker variations.

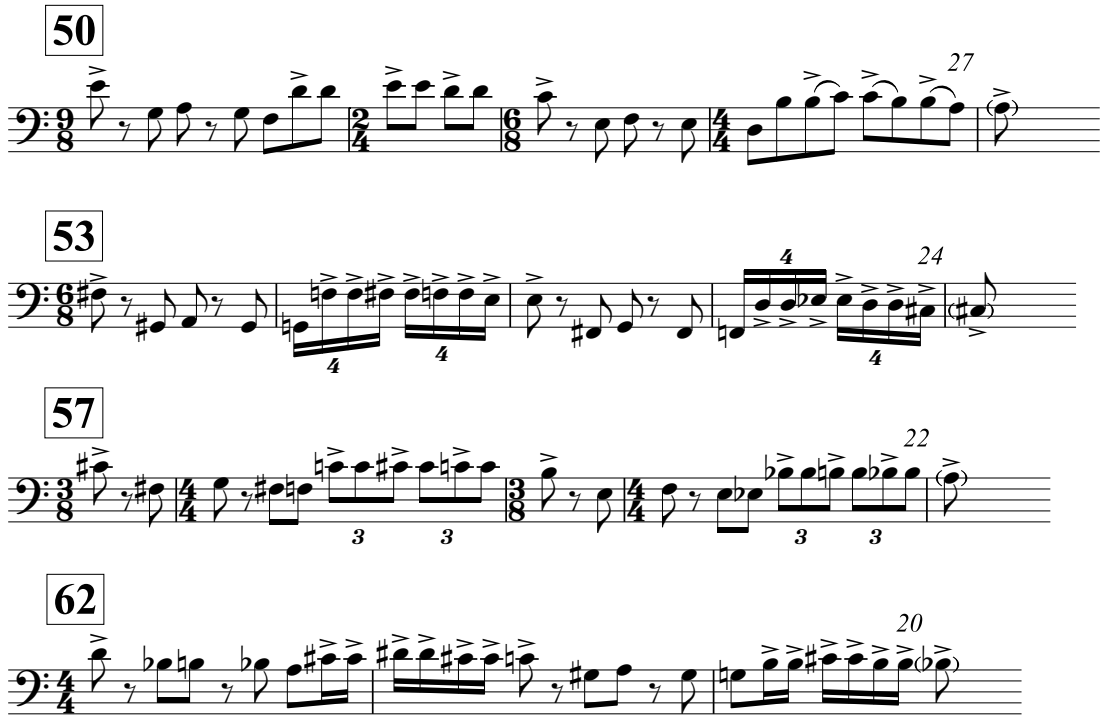

Figure 4.3: Rhythmic diminution of the thematic body in *Going on a Lion Hunt*. Numbers at the end of each stave indicate the length of the thematic body in quavers.

The rate of change is not constant but accelerates through the piece. As the variation units become shorter, there is more and more overlapping of parts; the texture changes from monophonic to polyphonic. At the same time, the increasing density of voicing and orchestration gives the music increasing 'mass', which, in combination with accelerating speed, creates exponentially increasing momentum.[9]

Booker posits that a well-constructed story has alternating phases of 'constriction and release', giving the narrative a satisfying 'rhythm'.[10] I found that the sense of momentum was enhanced by inserting little islands of tonality into the music to function as momentary 'resting points' along the way. Here the rhythmic variation processes go on unchanged, but the sudden suggestion of tonal stability seems to give the music (or the listener!) renewed 'strength' to keep pushing on. Perhaps this is because, by its very nature, tonality implies a goal that is both rewarding and reachable.

[9] Wilson Coker explains how 'sonorous motion' can produce the effect of momentum in this way in *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 42–46.
[10] Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 49.

Variation	Dynamic	Tonality	Texture	Percussion
1–15	crescendo to *ff*	atonal	monophonic	initial bass drum accents
16–18a	*p*	tonal	monophonic	initial bass drum accents
18b–29	*f*	atonal	monophonic with chordal accents	brake drums with chordal accents
30–33	*p*	tonal	monophonic with chordal accents	initial bass drum accents
34–49	*f*	atonal	homophonic	tom-toms/snare drum doubling rhythm of melody
50–52	*ff*	tonal	homophonic	tam-tam/cymbals
53–69	*ff*	atonal	homophonic	bass drum pulse, other percussion doubling rhythm of melody
Coda	*ff – pp*	atonal	homophonic	bass drum heartbeats

Figure 4.4: Constriction/release alternation in the structure of *Going on a Lion Hunt*. Grey indicates constriction, white indicates release.

The first two of these tonal islands are quiet and gentle; the third (at Variation 50) is loud and triumphant. Then the atonal music returns with renewed vigour (the bass drum pulses begin) and the music accelerates to its violent climax.

Just when it seems that the theme has been overcome and defeated by the chaos of the overlapping variations, the three groups suddenly fall into rhythmic alignment. At one level, it sounds like the theme *has* been broken – broken down to two notes, repeated over and over. It has died. But when the orchestra drops out and leaves the compound time pulse to the three bass drums (boom-boom, boom-boom) another level of meaning emerges: this is the sound of a *heartbeat*.[11] A heartbeat means life. The subject – the hero of the story – has endured the trial.

The high-adrenalin heartbeat gives way to a more sedate version, repeated without change for nearly 30 seconds. It is an odd ending, but it has a surprisingly strong impact in live performance. Perhaps it is because it leaves the listener alone with their thoughts, with no new information to process, yet still *inside* the music, because it has not

[11] It is also recognizably the *theme's* heartbeat, because it has been taken from the first bar of the theme. The bass drum patterns in the piece's four-bar introduction also point to this.

finished. And perhaps this gives a sense of 'virtual participation', similar to the effect that Elizabeth Margulis notes in the silences that follow repetitive Taizé singing.[12]

I think it is the repetitive nature of the music that enables the listener to identify so clearly and closely with the subject. That does not happen right at the beginning of the piece; only with the dawning realization that 'this is all there is' does the theme become the narrative subject. It is always there, just as the listener is, and so the listener begins to hear the musical subject as an extension of their own subjectivity. Margulis makes an interesting point about this in discussing music that has become familiar through extensive repetition:

> My claim is that part of what makes us feel that we're a musical subject rather than a musical object is that we are endlessly listening ahead, such that the sounds seem almost to execute our volition, after the fact… Repetition, I would argue, encourages embodiment.[13]

The listener is able to predict the continued recurrence of the theme, and so it becomes their subject, but the jolting unpredictability of the rhythmic variations are felt as a force that threatens the listener's subject as if from 'outside'.

The title refers clearly to the well-known children's story, but by dropping the word 'we're', the subject can become singular rather than plural. My program note does not refer to any specifically musical characteristics of the piece, but instead begins by quoting from the eponymous story (again without the first person plural), and draws out meaning from that – particularly the idea of perseverance through a difficult set of trials. The audience is prepared for the music's repetitiveness ('that's why this music sounds so relentlessly determined'), while the final sentence ('a fight for life') hints at the 'heartbeat' of the ending. I also offer a more personal level of engagement by explaining my own motivation for composing the piece: as a prayer for a friend.[14] Thus

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[12] Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 140–144.
[13] Margulis, *On Repeat*, 12.
[14] For the record, my friend was brought safely through that particular dark place in quite an extraordinary way (praise God!).

I point (admittedly rather subtly) beyond the subject of the story to its object: abundant life, found in Christ.[15] 'For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.'[16]

I cannot guarantee that any of this will actually come across to the listener. But it is there, if they read and listen closely.

[15] This is another reason for making it a 'lion hunt' rather than a 'bear hunt' – Christ is much more readily identified with a lion (thanks to Revelation 5:5 and C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*).
[16] Colossians 3:3 (NIV)

5. Theme as Object: hidden treasure

5.1. *Over the Hills and Far Away*

Five little ducks went out one day,
Over the hills and far away.
Mother Duck said, 'Quack quack quack quack!'
But only four little ducks came back.

This is the beginning of a 'counting song' nursery rhyme. It seemed a perfect fit for the kind of variation form I wanted to work with, for it consists of a succession of nearly identical verses with incremental variation and a simple plot about disappearing ducks. Its tune is a traditional one, well-known in Australia and the United Kingdom.[1]

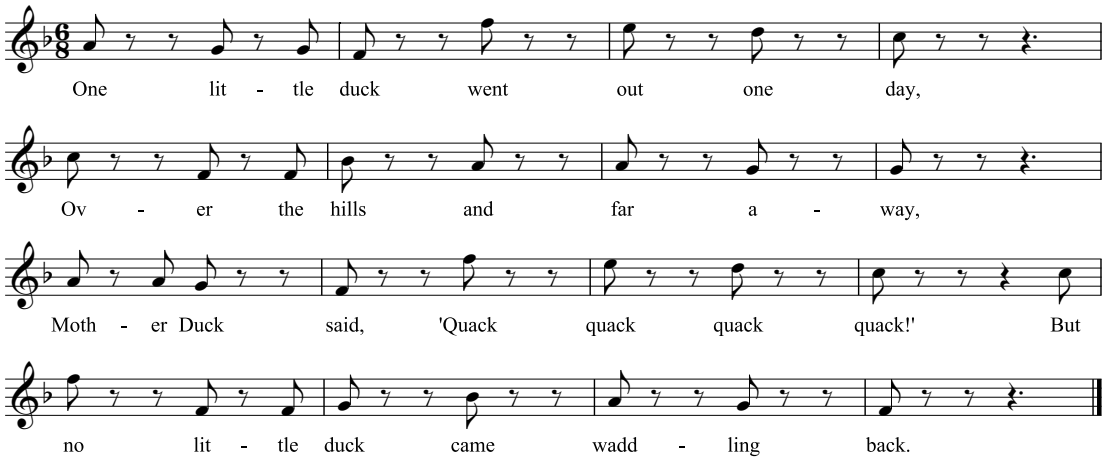

Figure 5.1: Real Theme of *Over the Hills and Far Away*. Melody adapted from *Five Little Ducks Went Out One Day* (shown with lyrics from penultimate verse).[2]

One can discern two objects in this nursery rhyme. The first object is freedom. The ducklings are compelled to wander off on a dangerous adventure 'over the hills and far away' from mother and home. Again and again they depart, and one by one they are lost.

This produces a second object. For Mother Duck, and for many traumatised toddlers hearing the song,[3] the object is for the ducklings to come back again. Most versions of

[1] Most Americans (annoyingly) know this nursery rhyme by a different tune.
[2] This is the tune as used in my composition. I notated it from memory, and later discovered that the final four bars are rendered slightly differently in most other versions. But I stuck with my own possibly mis-remembered version because it is musically more interesting.
[3] Several examples of young children getting emotional over this song can be found on YouTube, including this one (surprisingly, an American rendition of the British tune), in which

the nursery rhyme include a final verse in which all the ducklings suddenly (and inexplicably) return home.

The fulfilment of the first object seems meaningless, or at least deeply unsatisfying, without the second. From the perspective of Booker's basic plots, this narrative is not a simple Quest (the first object is too imprecise[4]), but more like a Voyage and Return (if the emphasis is on the ducklings),[5] or even Rebirth (if the emphasis is on the external 'redeeming figure' who initiates the return).[6] What Joseph Campbell calls the 'threshold of adventure'[7] must be crossed both ways. The adventure is all for nothing if you never make it back.

To tell this object-focused story, I reversed the usual procedure of variation form. The theme is placed after the variations and thus emerges as their object, the goal they work towards. To enhance this effect, the variations follow a strict cumulative process, revealing the theme gradually by the incremental addition or subtraction of notes within a set, rigid structure.

But as mentioned, there are really two objects in this story, one impelling departure and one impelling return, and so I used two complementary themes. The second object, and ultimate goal of the piece, is represented with the familiar nursery rhyme tune (**Figure 5.1**). In F major and with a lilting compound duple metre, it is a fitting representation of 'home', evoking stability, simplicity and joyful innocence.

The first object ('freedom'), which impels the beginning of the narrative, fits within the same structure (like the theme, its duration is 96 quavers), but is heard as a chaotic and syncopated theme in D aeolian, simple quadruple time, that is tonally incomplete ('tonic-requiring')[8] and doesn't make a whole lot of musical sense.

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the young singer ends up in tears: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAKx3GXHIMU. Published 13 October 2015.

[4] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum International, 2004), 95–96.

[5] Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 87–106.

[6] Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 193–214.

[7] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato: New World Library, 2008; first published by Pantheon, 1949), 210.

[8] See Elaine Sisman, 'Variations,' in *Grove Music Online* (Published online: 2001), https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29050.

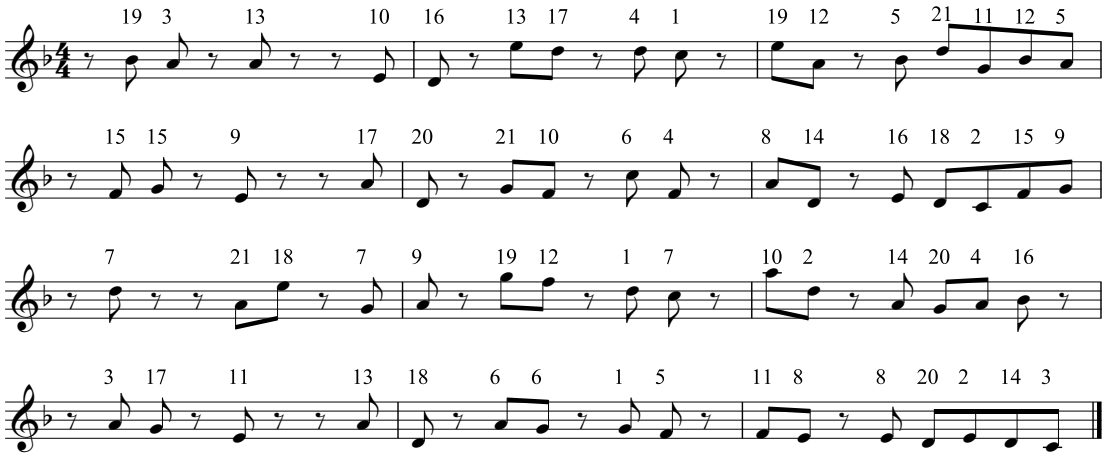

Figure 5.2: Shadow Theme of *Over the Hills and Far Away*. Numbers above the staff indicate the order in which notes are added to the variations.

I call this the Shadow Theme, because it is a sort of negative image of the Real Theme, replacing notes with rests and rests with notes, and suggesting a different tonality and metre. It is the object of a simple additive procedure, which begins at bar 47 when a muted trumpet (mimicking a duck's quack) plays just three notes spread bizarrely across 12 otherwise empty bars. The Shadow Theme is built up incrementally from this, its melody gaining three notes at a time, until after 21 variations all 63 notes are present. As isolated notes gradually agglomerate into melodic phrases, there is hope that a recognisable melody may be emerging, but by the 21st variation (bar 287), when the shadow theme is heard in full, it is clear that this first object is not particularly melodic or fulfilling. The freedom has resulted in chaos.

The sense of chaos is completed by the filling-in of the remaining 33 quaver rests with yet more notes at bar 299, creating a thematic unit of wall-to-wall quavers, 96 of them, strengthening the tonal centre of D minor but still providing no real resolution. The music has reached saturation point, and although the first object has apparently been reached (and all instruments are playing, as though it is the climax), the music sounds 'lost' as the white noise of a tam-tam drowns everything out.

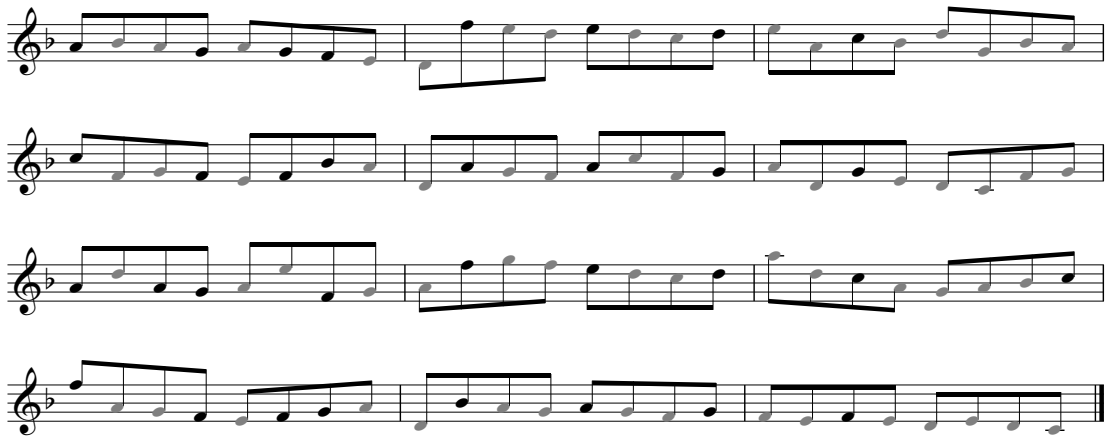

Figure 5.3: Saturated modal form of the theme in *Over the Hills and Far Away*. The Real Theme (black notes) is disguised within the Shadow Theme (grey notes).

This marks the turning point of the narrative, and here the second object (the return of the lost ducklings) kicks in. From bar 311 (oboe solo) we have another progression of 21 variations, this time following a reversal of the initial process: the 63 notes of the Shadow Theme are gradually removed – three at a time, and in the same order they were introduced – leaving behind the 33 additional notes, which turn out to be the Real Theme.

The gradual emergence of the Real Theme is disguised by maintaining the Shadow Theme's simple quadruple time feel until the last possible moment. Finally, at bar 563, once all notes of the Shadow Theme have been removed, the accompanying patterns drop out and we are allowed to hear the Real Theme as a compound time monophonic melody.

These simple cumulative variation procedures recall the cumulative form of the original nursery rhyme (with its disappearing ducks) and are also reflected in the orchestration. The two sets of 21 variations correspond to the 21 different kinds of instruments in the ensemble, with each variation seeing the addition of another instrument to the texture. Even the reversal of narrative direction is mimicked, as the instruments are introduced in reverse order the second time around. This necessitates a 'reversible orchestration order' in which balance issues are minimised without compromising the desired contrasts.

Departure (progressing towards Shadow Theme)

Bar	Instrument	Bar
47	Muted trumpet	551
59	Timpani	539
71	Xylophone	527
83	Marimba	515
95	Piano	503
107	Tuba	491
119	E-flat clarinet	479
131	Trombones (3)	467
143	Trumpets (3)	455
155	Baritone saxophone	443
167	Horns (4)	431
179	Tenor saxophone	419
191	Alto saxophone	407
203	Euphonium	395
215	Soprano saxophone	383
227	B-flat clarinets (3)	371
239	Flutes (3)	359
251	Bassoons (2)	347
263	Piccolo	335
275	Bass clarinet	323
287	Oboe	311
299	Tutti (Shadow Theme + Real Theme)	299

Return (progressing towards Real Theme)

Figure 5.4: Reversible orchestration order in *Over the Hills and Far Away*. White indicates treble group, black indicates bass group.

To enable some contrast of theme and accompaniment, the ensemble is divided into treble and bass, and the role of each half (theme or accompaniment) alternates with each variation. The accompaniment also follows its own strict rhythmic, harmonic and melodic processes, designed to parallel the cumulative variation procedures, but beyond the scope of this analysis.

So far I have only been discussing the main body of the piece, from bar 47 to 578, but the introduction and coda are vital to completing the narrative. The introduction consists of three sections, each cuing important elements to an understanding of the story. In bars 1–17 the Real Theme is heard in strict retrograde. It sounds unfamiliar, unusual, and frankly unsatisfactory – perfect for piquing the listener's curiosity and creating

anticipation. This passage also introduces the strict cumulative procedures that govern the piece, as the 33 notes of the theme are matched to the 33 musicians of the ensemble, a new musician joining in on each note.

Bars 18–20 present another brief cumulative procedure, this time an aleatoric accumulation of 21 instruments (corresponding to the sets of 21 variations) over a held D minor 7 chord. Starting with muted horns, the aleatoric phrases suggest the sound of quacking ducks and also hint at the rhythm of the Real Theme. A single rubber duck squeak in bar 20 is another hint at what is to come.

The chromatic melody played by the oboe in bars 21–33 (and repeated, with slight variations, in bars 34–46 by the whole ensemble in unison) is another disguised version of the Real Theme, this time interpolated with chromatic notes to create a strange wistfulness (it is a world apart from the diatonic music that precedes it). This is the 'Call to Adventure'[9] that sets the plot in motion.

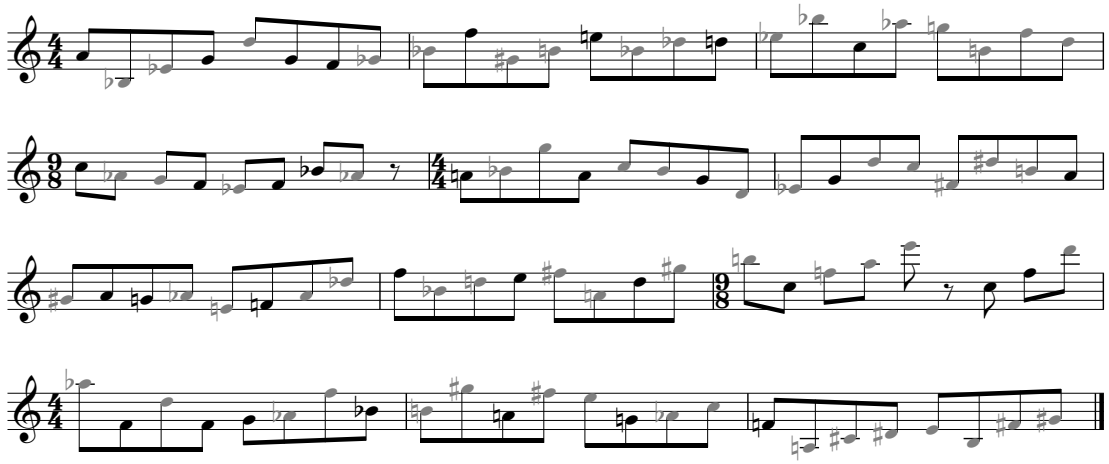

Figure 5.5: Saturated chromatic form of the theme in *Over the Hills and Far Away*. This has been transposed to show the Real Theme in F major, as it is in the previous excerpts.

The appearance of the oboe in a solo role encourages the listener to hear it as a character in the story – it becomes what Edward Cone calls a 'unitary virtual agent'.[10] Significantly, later on the oboe is the last instrument to join the 'departing' variations and the first to begin the 'returning' variations. This, together with its duck associations (courtesy of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*), indicates the oboe's role as 'Mother

[9] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 28.
[10] Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 89.

Duck' in the nursery rhyme narrative. At a deeper level, it is the 'redeeming figure' of the Rebirth plot.

The other unitary virtual agent to emerge is the fourth trumpet, whose three 'quacks' begin the ensuing adventure. This instrument also suggests the sound of a duck, but its role is the opposite to that of the oboe: it is the Littlest Duck to the oboe's Mother Duck. It leads the departure 'over the hills and far away', and so we then expect it to be the last to return. In fact, it goes missing altogether. This becomes apparent at the eventual appearance of the Real Theme at bar 563: the fourth trumpet, who had begun the retrograde iteration of this theme back in bar 1, is now conspicuously absent, and the theme misses its final note.

So even though we have found the identity of the Real Theme at this point, it seems that the second object – the return – has not been achieved. The long-awaited uncovering of the theme quickly fades to nothing, and there is an emptiness. This is underscored in bar 579 by a repetition of the D minor 7 chord from bar 18, this time with no 'duck' sounds heard above it.

The intention here is to signal Death. No matter how long or successful our adventure, we all end up dead, just like ducklings who wander over the hills and far away from their parents.[11] And that would be the end of the story, and the music, if I did not believe in resurrection.

Instead, there is a piano solo (bars 581–592). After some 10 minutes of strict mechanical processes unfolding in a rigid structure over a relentless pulse, the expressive rubato and Late Romantic harmonies of this passage come as a shock. In fact, it is simply a harmonisation of the oboe's wistful chromatic solo from the introduction (bars 21–32). When the oboe itself reappears (bar 593) to carry the melody, the missing fourth trumpet is suddenly 'resurrected' in another corner of the auditorium, standing up and picking out notes from the oboe's melody to reveal that the Real Theme was hidden inside it all along. Finally the whole ensemble joins in, together with a multitude of squeaking rubber ducks from around the audience. Now the music fades as if into eternity.

[11] Echoes here of 'All we like sheep have gone astray' (Isaiah 53:6).

Thus the journey of the story is not a circle back to where we started, but an outward spiral to something new. Or, to take Frye's model, the story has the upward motion of Comedy, reaching a 'home' state that may be implied at the beginning but is not actually experienced until the end.[12] It is a story of hope, based once again on a Christian understanding of resurrection.

If that sounds like a stretch, it's probably because it is. Call me ambitious,[13] but I'm trying to create something that is at once both ordinary and extraordinary, silly and sacred, and so there are all kinds of stretches going on. For one, the tone of the music finds itself stretched between light-hearted comedy on one side, and strict, uncompromising mechanisation[14] on the other. I would argue that the strict nature of the processes used, as well as their repetitiveness, actually adds to the comedy of the piece – perhaps it only fails when people take it too seriously.[15] But on the other hand, it's not flippant. The use of a familiar tune and a familiar bathtub toy serves to make the story's hope sound unexpectedly tangible and real, not just the distant, transcendent and vaguely spiritual belief that is so easily misconstrued from much more typically 'sacred' music.

A superficial engagement with the musical structure of this piece is likely to be underwhelming: the variation process is more mathematical than musical, the strict repetitions are obsessive and unrelenting, and all you get at the end for your trouble is a petty little children's song and some rubber duckies. I knew the program note would be vital in encouraging a deeper level of listening, but I was unsure how much needed to be spelt out.

Initially, I drafted a program note that reflected the underlying structure of the music, a kind of blow-by-blow account of the narrative. Here is one version, rather heavy on detail:

> What is over the hills and far away?

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[12] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 171.
[13] Or a Doctor of Philosophy ☺.
[14] One review compared the piece to Ravel's *Boléro* – see Graham Strahle, 'Pines of Rome: lord of the winds ducks out with ambitious finale', *The Australian*, 15 December 2015.
[15] Frye notes that 'repetition overdone or not going anywhere belongs to comedy' (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 168). Although the repetition of *Over the Hills and Far Away* does have an object, it most definitely sounds 'overdone'!

An endless path? A loop back to where we started? Nothing at all?

Let's find out. On this adventure are 33 musicians on 33 instruments, and they start by playing 33 notes. That's our 'theme', but it doesn't sound right, does it? We need to find a new one.

Here's a pond. Floating across the deep (11 bass notes and a timpani roll) are 21 ducklings, quacking rather randomly. We're all in this together.

An oboe solo – it's Mother Duck! She's dreaming of over the hills and far away. Then everyone is dreaming of over the hills and far away. But dreaming won't get us anywhere…

Time for the adventure! A muted trumpet 'quacks' three times and waddles off to find the way. Three notes? Is that the way to a better theme? The other instruments follow, one by one, and each adds its own three notes to the muted trumpet's tune. The theme gets more and more complicated. By the time everyone has joined in, it's pretty clear that this isn't going to work: our new theme is just a nonsensical string of 96 notes. (Is someone missing?) A tam-tam crash washes away the mess and everyone disappears.

… Except the oboe – it's Mother Duck again! She quacks out the 96-note-theme quickly by herself and waddles off. Where is she going? One by one the instruments return, but in the opposite order ('the first shall be last and the last shall be first'). And this time they each *remove* three notes – three *different* notes. And our theme becomes clearer and clearer as everyone joins in. In fact, it reminds me of something…

Aha! Everyone is back, and *here is the theme!* You know this tune! There *is* something over the hills and far away! But wait. Something is wrong. The theme fades away and the last note is… missing.

We're back at the pond, but now no one is floating across deep. All is dark. All is empty.

The piano plays an elegy. It was only a dream. It was only…

… but then Mother Duck quacks… and there is an echo!

The advantage of this program note is that the story is made quite clear – explicit at the 'nursery rhyme' level, and with a strongly suggested deeper meaning. The musical cues are also clear, such that a listener could easily follow the program note while listening

to the music and hear a clear correspondence between the two.[16] It makes the overall structure of the piece clear even to someone who cannot discern how the variation process is working.

But for that reason, this program note also gives too much away. Although the name of the song is not mentioned by name, the constant references to ducks and the story itself are highly likely to call to mind the melody of *Five Little Ducks Went Out One Day* long before the theme is recognisable in the music, diminishing the joy of discovery. The surprise of the ending (i.e., that there is more to come after the Real Theme finally emerges) is also spoilt. So I came up with a much shorter program note, used at the premiere and now included with the score. It makes no mention of ducks, and merely suggests that audience listen closely for the gradual emergence of a theme they may recognise. It ends with a string of questions, prompting an object-centred approach to the narrative, a desire to find out how things will end. For not until the end does anything make sense; without it, the story is meaningless.

> The happy ending of the fairy tale, the myth, and the divine comedy of the soul is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man.[17]

[16] Musicians may scoff snobbishly, but the feedback I have received as a writer of program notes indicates that many listeners apparently like to listen to classical music this way when given the chance.

[17] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 21.

6. Theme and Variations as Order and Transgression

6.1. *Cocoon*

> For tragedy is a *mimesis* not of men but of actions – that is, of life… And so the events – the plot – is the *end*[1] of tragedy, and the end is what matters most of all. Furthermore, you can't have a tragedy without an action, but you can have it without [clearly defined] characters.[2]

The story of *Cocoon* is rather vague and elusive. There are no determinate agents, and the theme (which is original) has no obvious role or extra-musical significance. Yet it is clear that the narrative motion of this piece is tragic.

It is important to distinguish between a tragic *topos* (essentially static musical characteristics such as a minor key and a slow tempo) and a tragic narrative shape – although often found together (as in *Cocoon*), they are conceptually distinct.[3] The tragic narrative, according to Frye's model, is the falling motion from innocence to catastrophe;[4] for Liszka and Almén, it is the defeat of a transgression by an order-imposing hierarchy.[5]

The particular narrative of *Cocoon* is one of dying to self, of surrender. Its conflict is 'psychodynamic' rather than social or interpersonal,[6] focused on the inner struggle of a broken individual.[7] The overwhelming experience is one of gradual and inevitable defeat, set in motion by a small but unmistakable flaw or transgression (*harmartia*) in the initial order.[8] The sense of 'giving in' to this state of affairs, rather than fighting

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[1] 'End' here is a translation of *telos*.
[2] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics: Translated and with a commentary by George Whalley*, ed. John Baxter and Patrick Atherton (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 73, ProQuest. All brackets and italics are from this edition.
[3] Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 139–140.
[4] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 162.
[5] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 66.
[6] Almén, *Theory of Musical Narrative*, 141.
[7] This is typical of tragedy. 'Comedy tends to deal with characters in a social group, whereas tragedy is more concentrated on a single individual.' Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 207.
[8] 'Tragic narratives intensify the consequences of transgressions, while romantic or comedic narratives find a way to enhance the dominant hierarchy.' James Jakób Liszka, *The Semiotic of Myth: A Critical Study of the Symbol* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 16.

against it, puts the narrative at the lowest, darkest end of tragedy, the realm of despair. In fact, the complete tearing apart (*sparagmos*) of the initial order into a state of entropy almost tips it into Frye's *mythos* of winter, irony.[9]

The narrative traces one long descent into what Joseph Campbell calls the 'belly of the whale'. 'The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.'[10] The metaphorical model I used for this was a silkworm spinning its cocoon: it slowly wraps a web around itself until it is hidden, seemingly dead.

The music reflects this 'spinning' or 'wrapping' by repeating and unwinding its theme over several voices simultaneously, creating a multi-layered web of continuous sound. The theme is an 18-note row whose intervals are strictly adhered to throughout the piece.

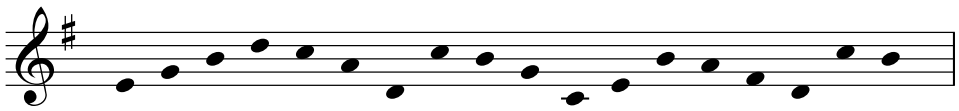

Figure 6.1: Theme of *Cocoon*.

The variations on this theme are limited to rhythm and simple transposition, so that it keeps its identity as a continuous 'thread' running throughout. The overlapping of the theme in several voices with incremental rhythmic variations creates a heterophonic texture for most of the work. Because of this, it cannot really be analysed in terms of variation form at the level of the thematic unit; however, it can be divided into larger sections corresponding to key and to the general variation process at work.

[9] Frye has *pathos* or *catastrophe* as the archetypal themes of tragedy, and *sparagmos* as the archetypal theme of irony. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 192.
[10] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato: New World Library, 2008; first published by Pantheon, 1949), 74.

Section	Bar	Key (minor)	Variation Process
1. Folding In	1	E	Elision of rests
	69	G	
	111	B	
	137	D	
	153	C	
	163	A	
	169	D	
	173	C	
	175	B	
2. Struggle	177	G	Elision of crotchets
	209	C	
3. Surrender	222	E	Accelerating canon at the unison/octave
	252	B	
	264	A	
4. Disintegration	274	F# – clarinet	Polytonal layering and gradual fading
	288	D – violin	
	297	C – cello	
	305	B – flute	

Figure 6.2: Structural outline of *Cocoon*.

All the variation processes suggest a movement of 'closing up' or withdrawal, mainly through gradual rhythmic diminution. The theme seems to be continuously folding in on itself, wrapped up more and more tightly. This is evident from the beginning of the piece: the simple removal of a quaver rest at bar 16 in the clarinet part can be heard as the *hamartia* that initiates the tragic plot. The first process is one of elision,[11] whereby the rests that keep the theme delineated into two clear phrases at the start of the work are gradually removed and the two halves of the theme slowly begin to 'fold in' on each other. The four voices reach a climactic unison at bar 177 (approximately halfway through the work), but the process continues as now the long notes of the theme (crotchets) are also incrementally shortened, causing the voices to diverge into ever more intricate heterophony.

[11] This term comes from Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 84.

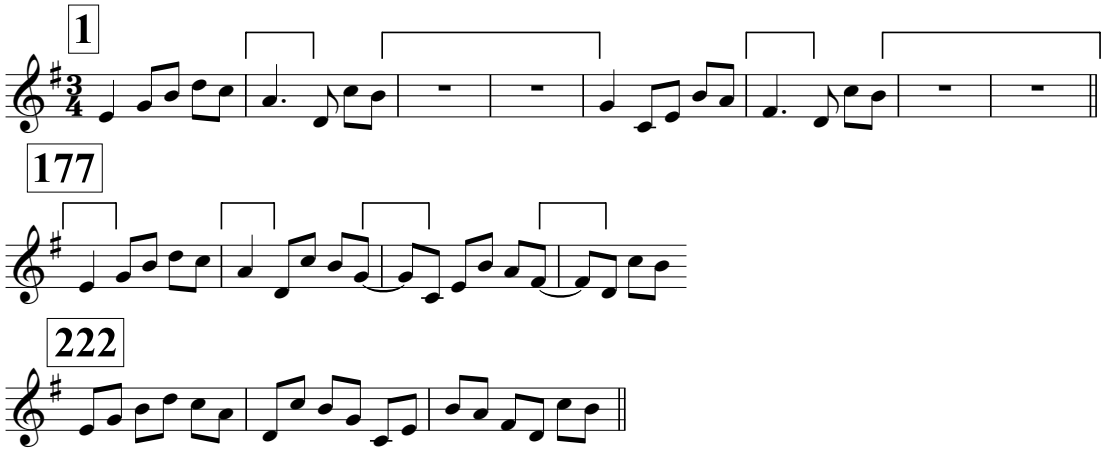

Figure 6.3: Elision of rests and longer note values in *Cocoon*. Brackets indicate where the elision occurs. Excerpts have been transposed into the same key.

A new, lighter texture is suddenly reached at bar 222, perhaps marking a shift in the perceived *telos* of the work from heroic struggle to tired surrender. But the ordered process of constriction continues, this time with the four melodic instruments playing the theme in a unison canon with gradually shortening note values, 'closing in' until it once more becomes run of continuous quavers.

The other process used throughout the work is that of modulation (see **Figure 6.2**). Abrupt key changes create a feeling of progression, or of arrival, that ultimately proves false. There is no goal, tonally speaking; the key changes are as arbitrary and circular as the 18 notes of the theme, to which they correspond. In the first half of the piece, the modulations spiral in to the unison at bar 177 by means of an exponentially increasing frequency[12] (i.e., they occur more often the closer they get to the climax). After that 'false' denouement, they continue to occur at more or less regular intervals. In the last part of the piece (bars 274–344), the modulations cease to apply to the whole ensemble. Their forward-moving impulse is thus severely weakened, and the resulting polytonal 'soup' destroys any remaining hope of a goal being reached.

From bar 305 to the end, there is a gradual dissolution of the theme, its notes replaced with rests in the four principal voices. More than a simple 'fade out', this has the effect of 'stifling' the music, so that the final notes sound feeble and choked.

The whole process unfolds according to an inexorable logic and order, leaving the listener with a heavy feeling of inevitable defeat. None of the musical 'transgressions'

[12] Derived quite simply from the Fibonacci sequence.

(rhythmic variations, modulations) have succeeded in freeing us from the theme's ever-tightening thread. The music dies. There is no suggestion of eternity.

Except in the title. As the program note explains, the title comes from a metaphor used by Saint Teresa of Ávila to describe the state of a soul before God: an attitude of surrender, dying to self.

> Forward then, my daughters! Hasten over your work and build the little cocoon. Let us renounce self-love and self-will, care for nothing earthly, do penance, pray, mortify ourselves, be obedient, and perform all the other good works of which you know… Die! Die as the silkworm does when it has fulfilled the office of its creation, and you will see God and be immersed in His greatness, as the little silkworm is enveloped in its cocoon.[13]

And anyone who knows anything about silkworms will recognise that this is not the end of the story. Even if we disregard Saint Teresa and my program note, the single word of the title – 'cocoon' – points toward metamorphosis and the eventual emergence of a butterfly.[14] The music's tragedy is subsumed into a much larger story. As Frye himself recognises, 'Christianity… sees tragedy as an episode in the divine comedy, the larger scheme of redemption and resurrection.'[15]

That doesn't make the music of *Cocoon* any less sorrowful. Indeed, it's one of the few things I've composed from within the heaviness of The Nothing (my name for depression). It crosses Joseph Campbell's 'threshold of adventure' broken and forlorn, scarcely daring to hope in a return.

> That passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation… But here, instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again.[16]

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[13] Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, *or The Mansions*, trans. the Benedictines of Stanbrook, ed. Benedict Zimmerman, 3rd edition (London: Thomas Baker, 1921), 131–132. http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/tic/index.htm.
[14] Or technically a silkmoth in this case, if you want to get pedantic.
[15] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 215.
[16] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 77.

7. A multifaceted theme and a web of variations

7.1. *Catcher Variations*

> 'You just didn't know this teacher, Mr Vinson. He could drive you crazy sometimes, him and the goddam class. I mean he'd keep telling you to *un*ify and *simp*lify all the time. Some things you just can't *do* that to.'[1]

All the other compositions in my portfolio are based around straightforward, linear plots, impelled by variations that are ordered according to simple cumulative procedures. For the major work, I wanted to try telling a different kind of story: one in which the variations are not so obviously linked together but have distinct, contrasting characters. This is a story about growing up and having to deal with the messiness and complexity of real life. The teleology is obscured, the connections between events are not immediately apparent, the subject is confused and the object out of reach.

The inspiration for this story is J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. This is a single-focus, first-person narrative about a teenage boy spending several days alone in 1940s New York, coming to terms with his place in a hard, 'crazy' world and mourning the innocence he must leave behind. His character is developed and the narrative progresses largely through his interactions – present and remembered – with a host of widely contrasting characters. He navigates his way through a chaotic and hostile world, desperately seeking for connection with someone.

The 'darkness' that surrounds the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, and his detachment from the outside world is characteristic of the plot known as Voyage and Return.[2] For Booker, Salinger's novel is actually a 'dark version' of Voyage and Return, an unfulfilled story in which the hero fails to grow, fails to make the switch from dark to light.[3] In this sense it aligns with Frye's Ironic archetype, the *mythos* of experience, in which order and idealism are defeated, shown to be unrealistic and unattainable.[4]

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[1] Holden Caulfield to Mr Antolini in J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (London: Penguin, 1994; first published in serial form in the USA 1945–1946), 166.
[2] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum International, 2004), 98.
[3] Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 394–396.
[4] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 223.

I think that interpretation is too simplistic. Although the book has often been seen as some kind of rebellious, brash glorification of teenage angst, I find a tenderness in it that is at odds with the Ironic archetype. Holden is not just an arrogant antihero recklessly tearing down all the old-fashioned ideals of the 'phony' culture around him; he is actually a broken person himself, searching for meaning and wholeness. I agree with Louis Menand, who writes that Salinger

> … wasn't trying to expose the spiritual poverty of a conformist culture; he was writing a story about a boy whose little brother has died. Holden, after all, isn't unhappy because he sees that people are phonies; he sees that people are phonies because he is unhappy… *The Catcher in the Rye* is not a novel of the nineteen-fifties; it's a novel of the nineteen-forties. And it is not a celebration of youth. It is a book about loss and a world gone wrong.[5]

The ending doesn't 'fix' the world (as it would in a Comedy), but it does give Holden a glimmer of redemption, through the love of his little sister Phoebe.[6] He sees that not everything is lost and he finally stops running away.

When I first read this novel, I did not know if I loved or hated it until I reached the end; its episodic and frequently digressive structure both frustrated and intrigued me. I have used variation form to create a similar experience in music, setting up an episodic structure that is full of jarring contrasts, with short segments of music that often peter out or get interrupted. But just as a single first-person perspective ties together the manifold characters and events of Salinger's novel, so a single musical theme unites the otherwise disparate variations.

The underlying musical theme is the Scottish folksong (collected by Robert Burns) that gives *The Catcher in the Rye* its title. It is used as a harmonic framework more than anything – almost like a ground bass – but most of the variations also feature at least one of its characteristic melodic motifs (leaps of a sixth, scotch snap, dotted rhythm, descending scale).

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[5] Louis Menand, 'Holden at Fifty: *The Catcher in the Rye* and what it spawned,' *The New Yorker*, 1 October 2001. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/10/01/holden-at-fifty.

[6] Booker argues that Phoebe remains an 'elusive' anima, offering an impossible return to a past innocence, leaving Holden 'frozen in a state of arrested development… unable to grow up.' (Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 396). But I think Booker misinterprets Holden's character (and thus his redemption) by ignoring the death of his brother Allie, which I see as the underlying reason for Holden's 'fall' in the first place. Allie is the elusive one; Phoebe, for all her 'innocence', is very real.

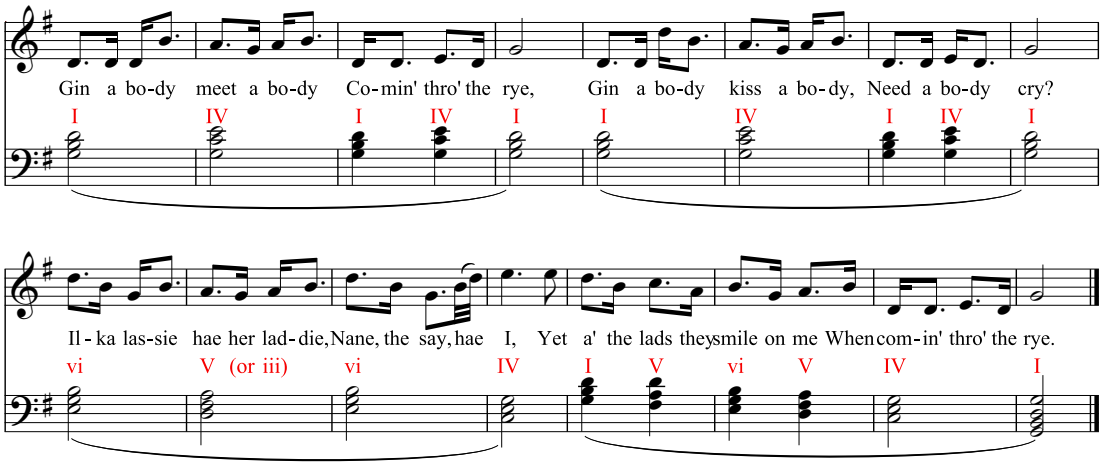

Figure 7.1: Theme of the *Catcher Variations* ('Comin' thro' the rye').

In Salinger's novel, this folksong serves as a symbol for childhood innocence.[7] It first appears when Holden hears a little boy singing it while walking along the street, oblivious to the dangers of the world around him:

> The cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place, his parents paid no attention to him, and he kept on walking next to the curb and singing 'If a body catch a body coming through the rye'. It made me feel better.[8]

Much later, while talking to Phoebe, the misheard (or misremembered) lyrics suggest to Holden the idealised image of what he would like to be: a 'catcher in the rye', protecting kids from running through an imaginary field of rye and falling off the edge of a cliff.[9] It is a peculiar, fantastical notion, and it reveals his longing to recapture some kind of lost innocence.

Just as Salinger's title is unexplained for the first hundred pages of his book, the folksong theme does not appear in a recognisable form until halfway through the *Catcher Variations*. When it does (at Variation 51), it is made to sound as simple and peaceful as possible, but also – like Holden's dream – impossibly idealistic and out-of-reach. Coming after nearly twenty minutes of G major,[10] the sudden shift to E-flat major marks the theme out as something altogether different. We glimpse it as though from a

[7] Somewhat ironically, given the meaning the lyrics!
[8] Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, 104.
[9] Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, 156.
[10] I use the term 'major' loosely; although the tonality is clearly centred on G, it is not particularly diatonic (hence the absence of a key signature).

great distance and it sounds unattainable; it is too far away from the 'real world' of G major, which quickly reasserts itself as though nothing has happened.[11]

Yet this is the theme that underlies all the variations, much like the theme of 'lost innocence' that underlies the story of the novel. Even though the moment of recognition does not occur until Variation 51, it is retrospectively clear that this theme has been in the music from the beginning. It has, however, always been distorted – brash, surly Variation 1 (initially heard as the theme by virtue of its premier position) is essentially an inversion of the familiar song (see **Figure 7.2**), and most of the subsequent variations have been based on this 'inverted' version. The tonal separation of Variation 51 shows that there can no return to this 'pure' form of the theme – innocence lost cannot be regained. We hear it not as an arrival, but as a long-lost memory, forever in the past. So the music stumbles onwards (back in G major), looking for another answer.

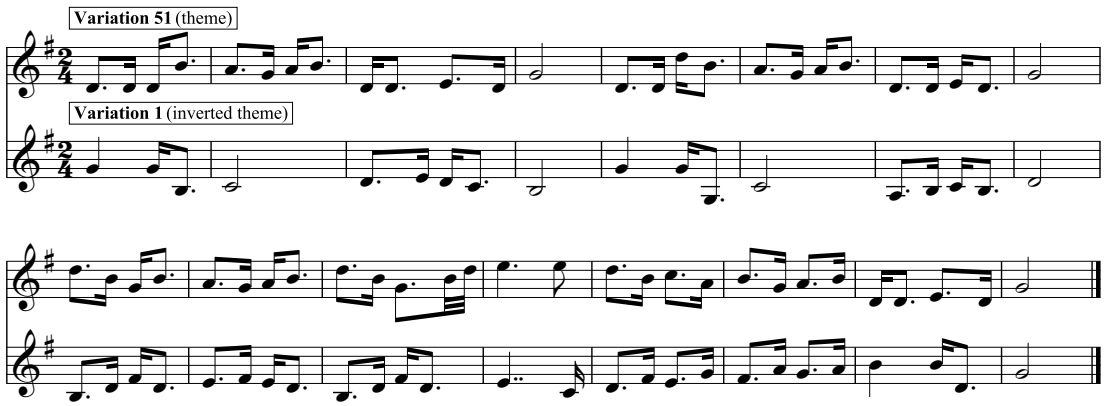

Figure 7.2: Melodic comparison of two of the *Catcher Variations*, showing how Variation 1 is essentially an inversion of the familiar melody heard in Variation 51.

Aside from their underlying theme, there is little apparent connection between the 90 variations. Their ordering is disorienting; instead of grouping similar variations together, I have arranged them so that the music's tempo, style and mood are constantly in flux.[12] The story is constantly moving, yet also going nowhere. 'For a guy who wishes he could pull a Peter Pan on his biological clock, having no forward momentum

[11] Gregory Karl calls this kind of sequence an 'enclosure', in which a contrasting, interrupting element is 'swept aside' by a swift return to the original state. Gregory Lewis Karl, 'Structuralism and Musical Plot,' *Music Theory Spectrum* 19, no. 1 (1997): 13–34. https://doi.org/10.2307/745997.

[12] This isn't strictly true; there *are* groupings of similar variations, but they are usually short-lived; Variations 68–80 constitute the longest continuous stretch of similar variations (all fast and loud), creating momentum toward the climax; but even here there are extreme contrasts of dissonance and consonance, for example.

in the narrative is kind of the point.'[13] The way the music keeps chopping and changing between various moods and styles suggests a 'lost' subject, lacking direction, trying to find himself in a succession of 'masks',[14] or continuously reconstructing his persona as a defence.[15] All that movement without a clear sense of direction implies an ironic narrative, rapidly descending into madness, and the obsessive ubiquity of G major seems to direct the music's violence inwards, 'an impulse toward self-destruction'.[16]

The eclectic mix of styles, liberal use of dissonance and juxtaposition of naïveté with bitter satire is inspired by the language of Salinger's novel: a rhythmic, conversational and seemingly casual tone[17] that is actually a mingling of 'both the slob and the literate idiom'.[18] Many of the variations are curtailed, reflecting the incomplete, distracted thought processes of a protagonist who is constantly changing his mind and withdrawing.

The 90 variations were conceived as character portraits of the various people Holden meets or remembers throughout the novel. Just as certain key characters reappear during the story, so certain variations recur in the musical structure, like secondary themes or thematicised variations.[19] As these recurring variations become familiar, they hint at a larger-scale narrative beyond the jarring contrasts heard at the level of adjacent variations.

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[13] Shmoop Editorial Team, 'The Catcher in the Rye,' *Shmoop University, Inc* (last modified November 11, 2008; accessed October 12, 2018), https://www.shmoop.com/catcher-in-the-rye/.
[14] Almén sees this kind of effect in the contrasting *topoi* of Schoenberg's Six Little Piano Pieces, op. 19, no. 4, which he analyses as an example of 'extreme tragic irony'. Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 186.
[15] Danielle M. Roemer, 'The Personal Narrative and Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*,' *Western Folklore* 51, no. 1 (1992): 6. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1499640.
[16] Carl F. Strauch, 'Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure. A Reading of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*,' *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 2, no. 1 (1961): 14. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1207365.
[17] Anonymous, '*The Catcher in the Rye* is still harrowing, still beautiful, and still relevant'. https://slothropsgrave.wordpress.com/2013/05/19/the-catcher-in-the-rye-is-still-harrowing-still-beautiful-and-still-relevant/.
[18] Strauch, 'Kings in the Back Row', 7.
[19] Swinkin's term is 'thematic variations'. Jeffrey Swinkin, 'Reference and Schenkerian Structure: Toward a Theory of Variation,' *Indiana Theory Review* 25 (2004): 212. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24045285.

Set of recurring variations	Key	Character	Function
14, 17, 30, 37, 53, 66, 76	G	Jane Gallagher	Female redeeming figure who remains distant
48, 60, 63, 77	G	Sally Hayes	Female redeeming figure who is unsuccessful
16, 45, 82	E	Allie Caulfield	The 'broken' element that underlies everything; source of sorrow
32, 84, 89	C	Phoebe Caulfield	Female redeeming figure who is successful
1, 81, 90	G/C	Holden Caulfield	Protagonist, broken then redeemed

Figure 7.3: Some of the recurring variations of *Catcher Variations* and their function in the story.

Among the dizzying array of contrasting variations, those that recur are able to function as points of stability or re-orientation. Although none recur verbatim, their 'types' are distinct enough to be familiar, and the way they change at each occurrence tells its own story. For example, the hesitant but peaceful 'Jane Gallagher' variations progress from fleeting fragments (Variations 14, 17, 30) to a full exposition (37) and then back to fragments of increasing dissonance (53, 66, 76) as it becomes apparent that there is no redemption to be had from this quarter. The 'Sally Hayes' variations follow a similar path, from quiet and hesitant (48) to full and happy (60) to bittersweet (63) and broken (77).

When the melody of Variation 1 (the inverted theme) returns at Variation 81, played by one finger, it sounds like the music has finally broken down and there is nowhere left to turn. The descending scale motif (heard in several earlier variations, particularly 26 and 38) this time goes right down, via dissonant parallel 9ths, to the depths of the keyboard for a final recurrence of the despairing E major-minor tonality (Variation 82, 'Allie Caulfield').

At this point in the story – Holden's 'Dark Night of the Soul'[20] – the protagonist (not to mention the composer) is all but spent. The final effort for redemption (Variations 87 and 88, corresponding to Holden's visit to his old teacher, Mr Antolini) tries a completely different approach, slow and logical. These variations present a gradual

[20] Strauch, 'Kings in the Back Row', 19.

'verticalisation'[21] of the theme in both its normal and inverted versions, a method that results in dissonance and failure once more.

The protagonist has been trying to save himself,[22] but his redemption can only come from outside. I see this story not as an Irony (defeat), nor as Voyage and Return (the heroism of the protagonist), but as Rebirth.

> What marks out the Rebirth plot is the way we see the central figure eventually frozen in his dark and lonely state with seemingly no hope of escape. And it is here, as light stealing in on the darkness, that the vision appears which inspires the stirring back to life, centred on a particular redeeming figure: invariably, where the story has a hero, a Young Woman or a Child.[23]

In Salinger's novel, this 'redeeming figure' is Holden's little sister Phoebe. Musically, it is a recurring C major variation – tonally, a restful plagal cadence away from G major, a step that is significant yet reachable. This key is only heard twice (Variations 32 and 84) before the final two variations finally make the longed-for connection, uniting G major subject and C major redeemer without compromising either of them.[24] This signifies acceptance rather than escape; the melody is the same, but it has been 'redeemed' into a more peaceful harmony. Bryce Taylor describes this redemption pattern beautifully when he sees it realised in the 'incarnational'[25] love of Phoebe for her brother:

> By identifying herself with Holden in an act of loving solidarity, she reveals to him once and for all the hypocrisy of his fantasies. Rather than 'catching' (i.e., saving) her innocence, Holden's self-imposed exile threatens to drag Phoebe away from her childhood. Seeing this, Holden finally lets go of his pretensions to be a saviour and finds the humility to receive salvation from Phoebe, who has become his 'catcher'… In a sense, Phoebe enables Holden to accept the fact of fallenness, and to do so not out of cold resignation, but out of humility. Holden accepts that he cannot, by himself, save innocence, and he comes to love the world even in its fallenness.[26]

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[21] Term borrowed from Wilson Coker, *Music and Meaning: A Theoretical Introduction to Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 84.
[22] 'Holden, for much of the novel, nurses an image of himself as saviour.' Bryce A. Taylor, 'Holden Caulfield: Sort of a Christian,' *Religion and the Arts* 18 (2014): 665.
[23] Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 204.
[24] By means of some C lydian harmonies.
[25] Taylor, 'Holden Caulfield: Sort of a Christian', 655.
[26] Taylor, 'Holden Caulfield: Sort of a Christian', 667.

It is not a dramatic 'eucatastrophe',[27] as in *Over the Hills and Far Away*, but a gentle one – the hope of redemption rather than its fulfilment, but no less crucial for that.

In this analysis I have attempted to show how the music of the *Catcher Variations* tells a redemptive story in its own terms, with musical structures such as themes, variations and key centres functioning as the agents and events in its narrative. Although it is Salinger's novel that inspired the structure and dramatic teleology of the composition, I hope that the musical drama can be just as coherent and captivating for those who have no knowledge of the book. The *Catcher Variations* are a personal musical response to Salinger's novel rather than an attempted 'retelling' of it.

It is well known that Salinger refused to allow any adaptations of his book, and so in this case I am reluctant to provide any explicit textual references to it, such as a program note. The allusive title and the use of the folksong ('Comin' thro' the rye') will suggest a connection for those familiar with the novel, but it is up to the listener to join the dots; this analysis is not a program note. Most of the audience at the first (private) performance of this work had not read Salinger's novel or had forgotten it,[28] but informal feedback indicated that the musical narrative was compelling enough on its own terms.[29] If readers and viewers are 'experts in narrative by virtue of being human',[30] so are listeners.

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[27] Word coined by J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories' (first published 1947), in *Tales from the Perilous Realm*, illustrated by Alan Lee (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 384.
[28] And of those who read the novel especially for my recital (I mentioned the book in my invitation), several disliked it, which suggests that they did not understand the story in the same way I did – perhaps the music actually made *more* sense to them than the book!
[29] Private recital, *Catcher Variations* performed by the composer, Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, 10 February 2018.
[30] Suzanne Keen, preface to *Narrative Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), x.

8. Conclusion

In this exegesis I have shown how the traditional musical form of 'variations on a theme' can be adapted as a structure for musical storytelling. I have explored this creatively through the original compositions of the portfolio, covering a range of narrative types and varying degrees of narrative specificity. Using variation form as a structural tool rather than a rigid framework, I have shown how two of its distinctive features – its monothematicism and its repetitive, cellular structure – can be used effectively in instrumental concert music to convey a story to the listener.

The monothematicism of variation form is well suited to single-focus narratives, and it readily implies a 'first-person' perspective. This is enhanced by the inherent repetitiveness of the form, which encourages the listener to internalise the musical subject and thus enter into the story, identifying strongly with the protagonist. The theme can then be readily perceived as the story's subject (when clearly established at the outset) or object (when revealed as the goal or outcome of the variations). These two possibilities are explored in *Going on a Lion Hunt* and *Over the Hills and Far Away* respectively.

The segmented, episodic nature of variation form can be made to suggest narrative flow when the variations follow a logical, linear progression. A simple, incremental procedure applied to a theme, resulting in a string of linked variations, creates implicit causality between successive events, as in a narrative. Although such minimalist processes have often been used to *discourage* a narrative listening strategy (by shifting a listener's attention away from long-range drama and towards a trance-like or meditative state), their implicit teleology can have the opposite effect when narrative cues are added to a piece, encouraging expectation and anticipation in the listener. This approach to variation form can be used to suggest a simple narrative structure of gradual growth or change, as in *Teklanika Twilight*, *The Imaginary Waltz* and *Yukon Sunrise*. It can also form the backbone of a more complex narrative on a larger scale, as in *Cocoon*, *Going on a Lion Hunt* and *Over the Hills and Far Away*.

A more traditional approach to variation form, in which the variations are independent and distinct, is suited to a different kind of storytelling: less linear and more interwoven. When carried out on a large scale, there is the potential in this form for an intricate web of relationships between the variations, reflecting a more complex narrative in which

there may be many diverse characters and chronological deviations. But the overall monothematicism means that the story is still focused very much on the experiences of an individual subject. This is the approach I have used in the *Catcher Variations*. There is much scope here for further creative exploration.

As a composer, I have appreciated the formal clarity and simplicity that variation form provides. It has helped me to be more focused and deliberate in how I structure music and develop material. I have embraced the form's intrinsic repetitiveness and have deliberately pushed the limits of its monothematicism and cellular structure. If anything, I have taken things too far, as I am wont to do! But one of the primary purposes of this project was to push myself out of my comfort zone and to experiment with untried compositional methods and aesthetics. I am looking forward to composing more intuitively again in the future, swinging the pendulum back away from my self-imposed strict adherence to musical structures and processes, and towards a middle-ground that combines freedom of expression with a newly-won clarity of form.

Musical storytelling, the other focus of this project, is something I have always been attracted to, but my understanding of its potential has become much clearer with this project. I have shown how subtle narrative cues (textual or musical) can reveal stories even within rather minimalist, mechanical musical structures. Here also, I have possibly taken things too far (at least in the exegesis), and perhaps the most valuable thing I have gained from subjecting musical narrative and musical storytelling to such intense analysis is a greater appreciation of *non*-narrative listening strategies. While music *can* tell stories – and perhaps always does, in some sense – there is much more to it than this.

Nevertheless, stories are vital to how I perceive and compose music, and a significant part of this project's originality lies in the multi-layered approach I have taken to musical storytelling. Rather than fear the naïveté and lack of sophistication often associated with program music (particularly where simple stories like fairy-tales are involved), I have sought to use these traits to my advantage. When allied with the transparency and repetitiveness of variation form, simple musical plots can become so obvious and self-evident (sometimes ironically, sometimes humorously) that listeners *want* to look for a deeper significance, to ask questions of what they are hearing. If the title and program notes can encourage this, without providing ready-made answers, then

it enables the listener to enter into the music's story and hear it as their own. And that is a wonderful way to experience music. If I have enabled that, I have done well.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Lewis Carroll's
Jabberwocky

soprano/melodica
flute/piccolo
cello
piano

Also required:
4 kazoos, ratchet, empty balloon, inflated balloon, pin, glass of water, random cutlery, egg shaker, siren whistle, party whistle, coconut shells

David John Lang

2017

Jabberwocky

Introductory Notes for Performers

Some background to the piece…

This composition was originally written for the 18th birthday of Jane Ruckert, a.k.a Gurdy Girl, and also fulfils an earlier request (14th February 2007) from the dedicatee for a "slightly tonal" song. It was first composed, fairly impractically, for eight multi-instrumentalists of the most unusual sort (eg. cello/piano accordion, clarinet/bassoon, mezzo-soprano/hurdy-gurdy) who were friends of the composer and dedicatee. A recording with these musicians was made in 2008 and can be considered the "definitive" version.

However, in light of the near impossibility of any future performance of that original version, the composer here presents a considerably more practical arrangement for four performers: soprano, flautist, cellist and pianist. This arrangement has been carried out especially for Alondra Vega-Zaldivar, but it is hoped that other singers may also like to give the piece a go. Don't be put off by the requirement for kazoos…

What's that? Kazoos?

Yes, all players require kazoos. Fortunately, only the soprano needs to have the ability to play their kazoo in tune. The tuning of the other kazoo parts is intended to be more or less random. Unless otherwise specified, kazoo players are asked to play something resembling the notes on the page, but are invited to randomise the transposition. Please do not play in the same key as anyone else.

Possible concessions sanctioned by the composer

If the soprano cannot access a melodica, the melodica parts may be played on another melody instrument on which the singer is proficient – preferably something distinctive and unusual, as this part represents the Jabberwock. Originally this part was written for hurdy-gurdy, but I thought a melodica should be easier to come by. As a last resort, the melodica part may be played on kazoo. But good luck with the section that is in parallel tritones with the piano. ☺

Other unusual instruments marked in the score (for example, coconut shells) may be substituted at the performers' discretion for anything that makes a similar kind of sound.

Dramatic performance

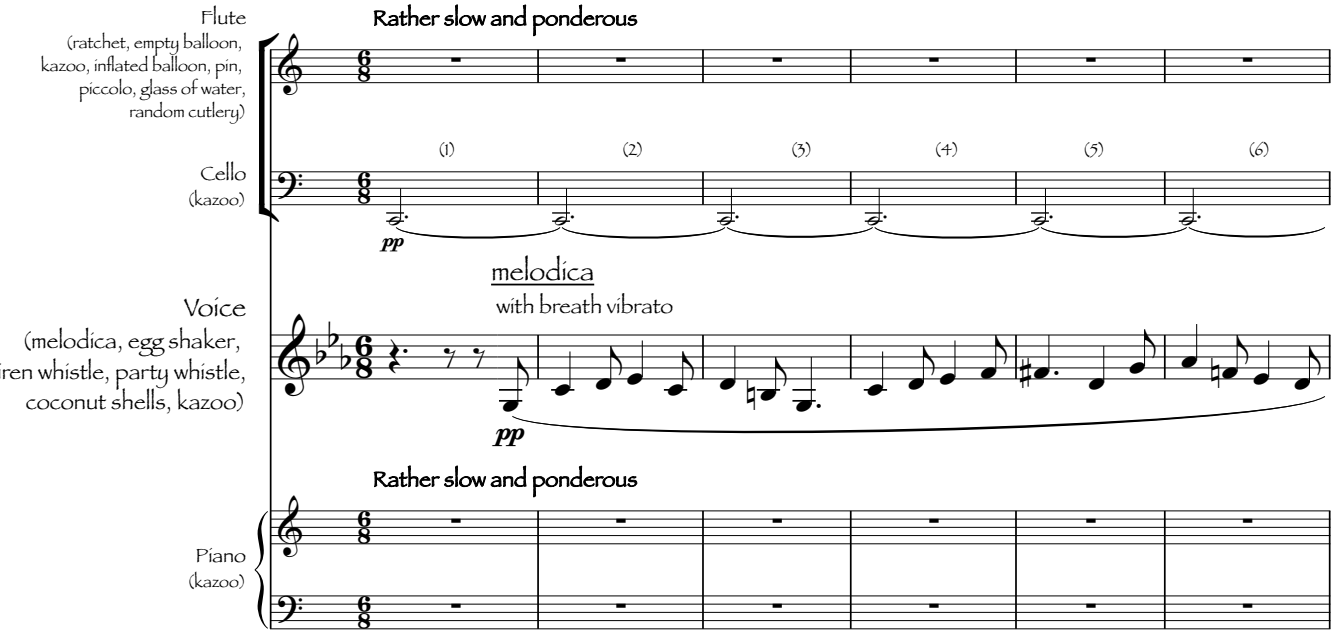
The key to a successful performance of this piece is to make it *theatrical*. The whole thing is one big there-and-back-again adventure, told in words and music. Drama should come naturally to the soprano (knowing what sopranos are like), but the other instrumentalists will need to get into the theatrical spirit of the piece as well. Particularly the flautist, whose ratchet kills the Jabberwock at the climax of the work.

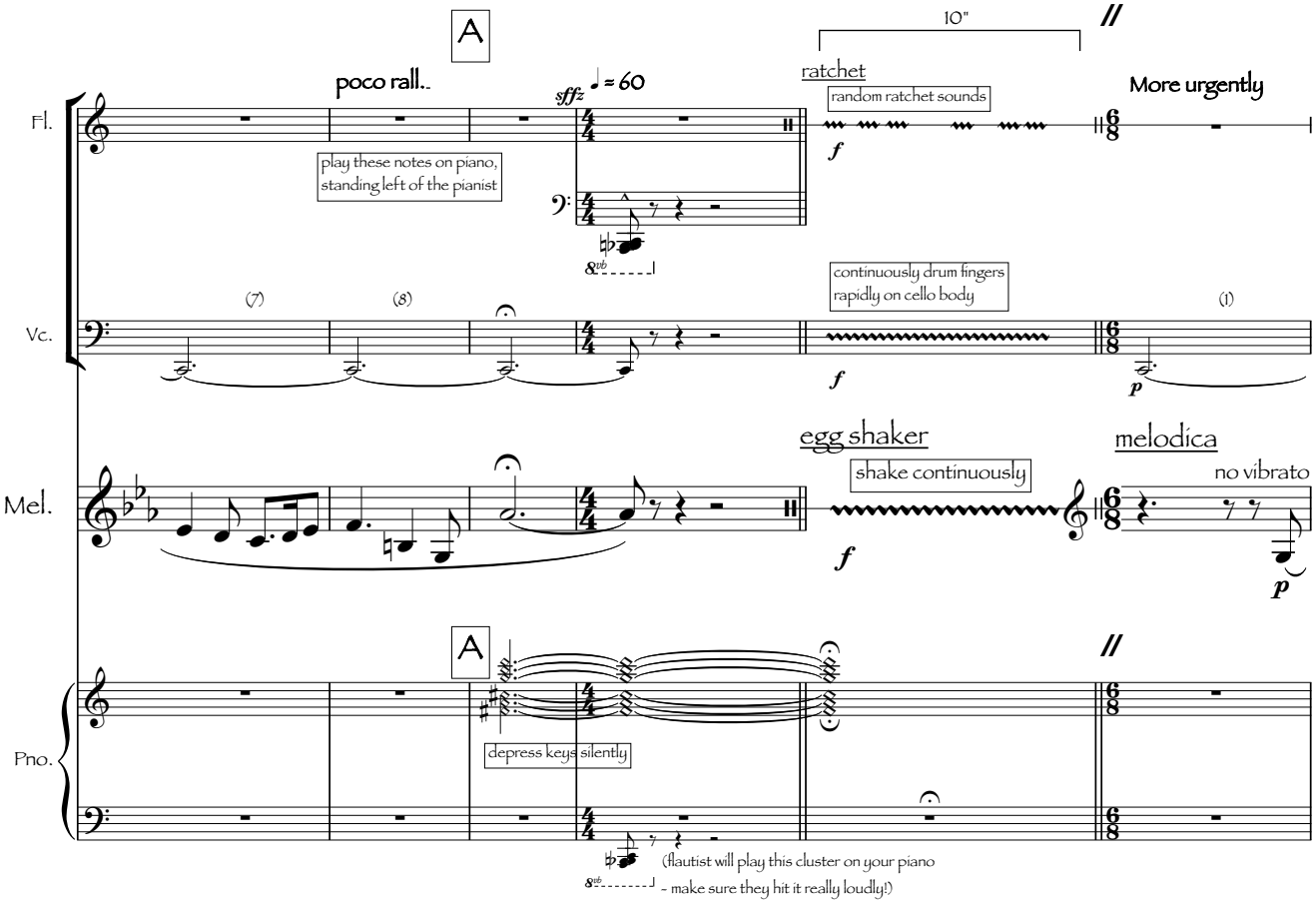
composition dedicated to Jane Ruckert
arrangement dedicated to Alondra Vega-Zaldívar

Jabberwocky

Lewis Carroll

David John Lang





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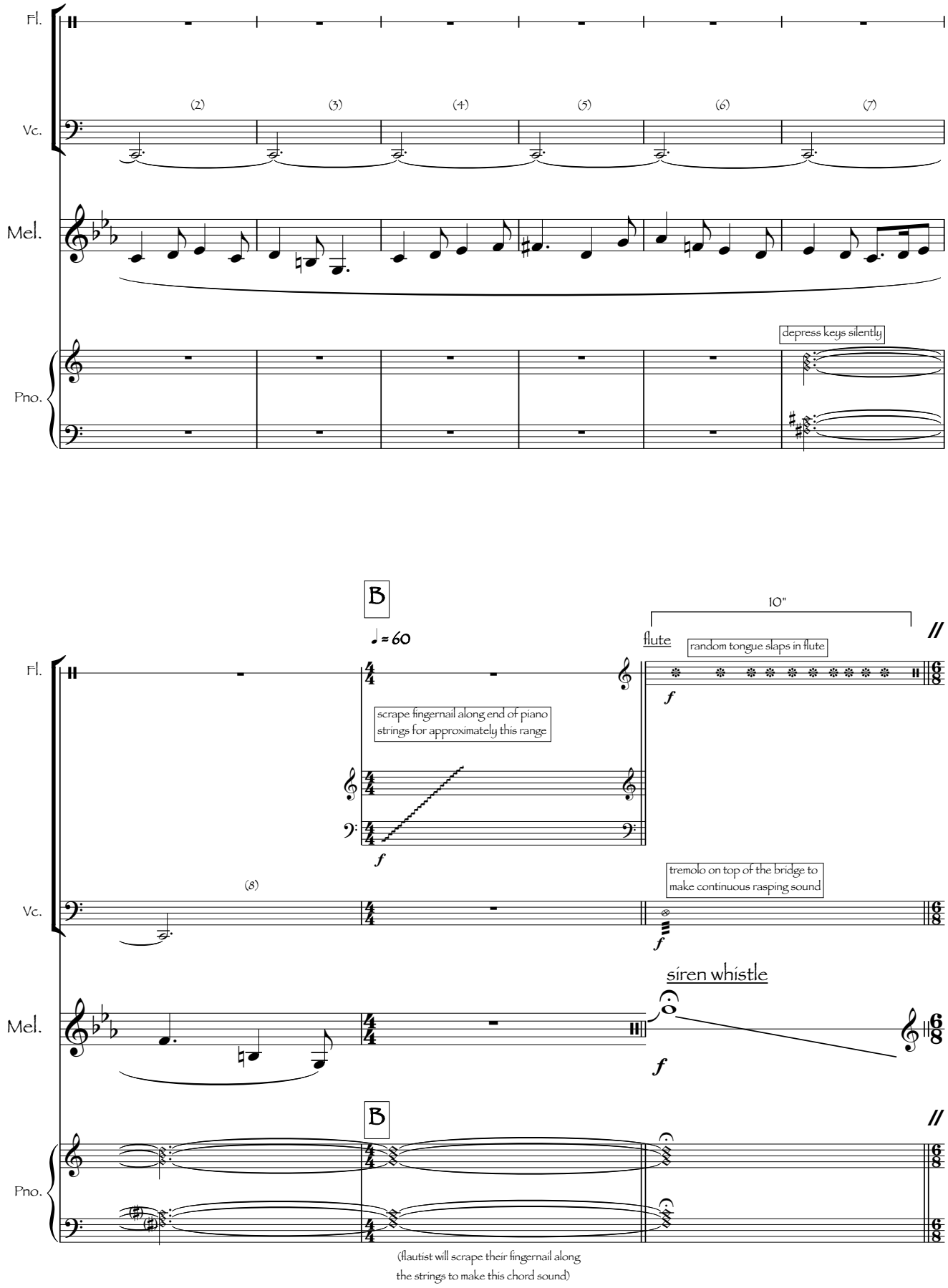

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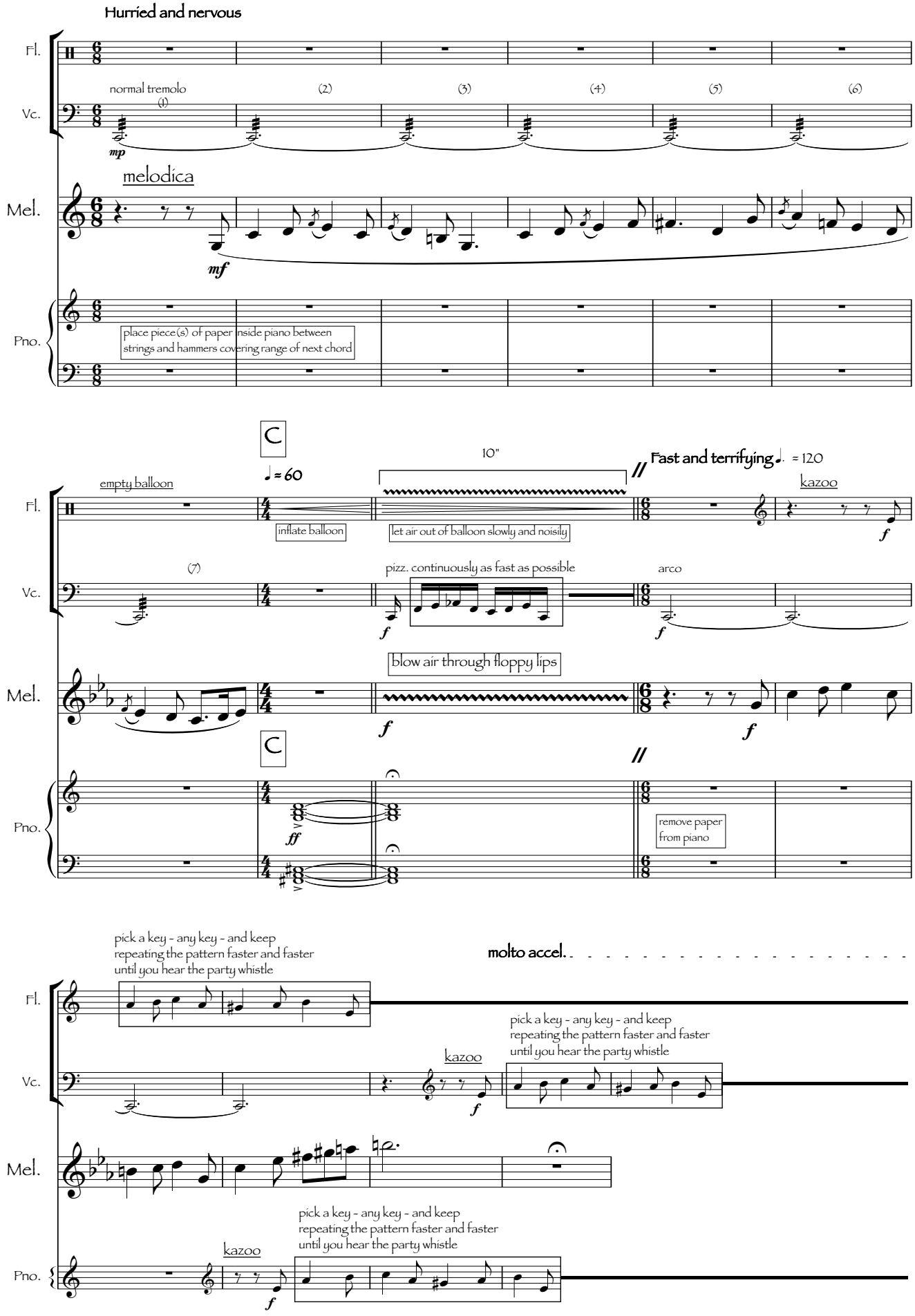

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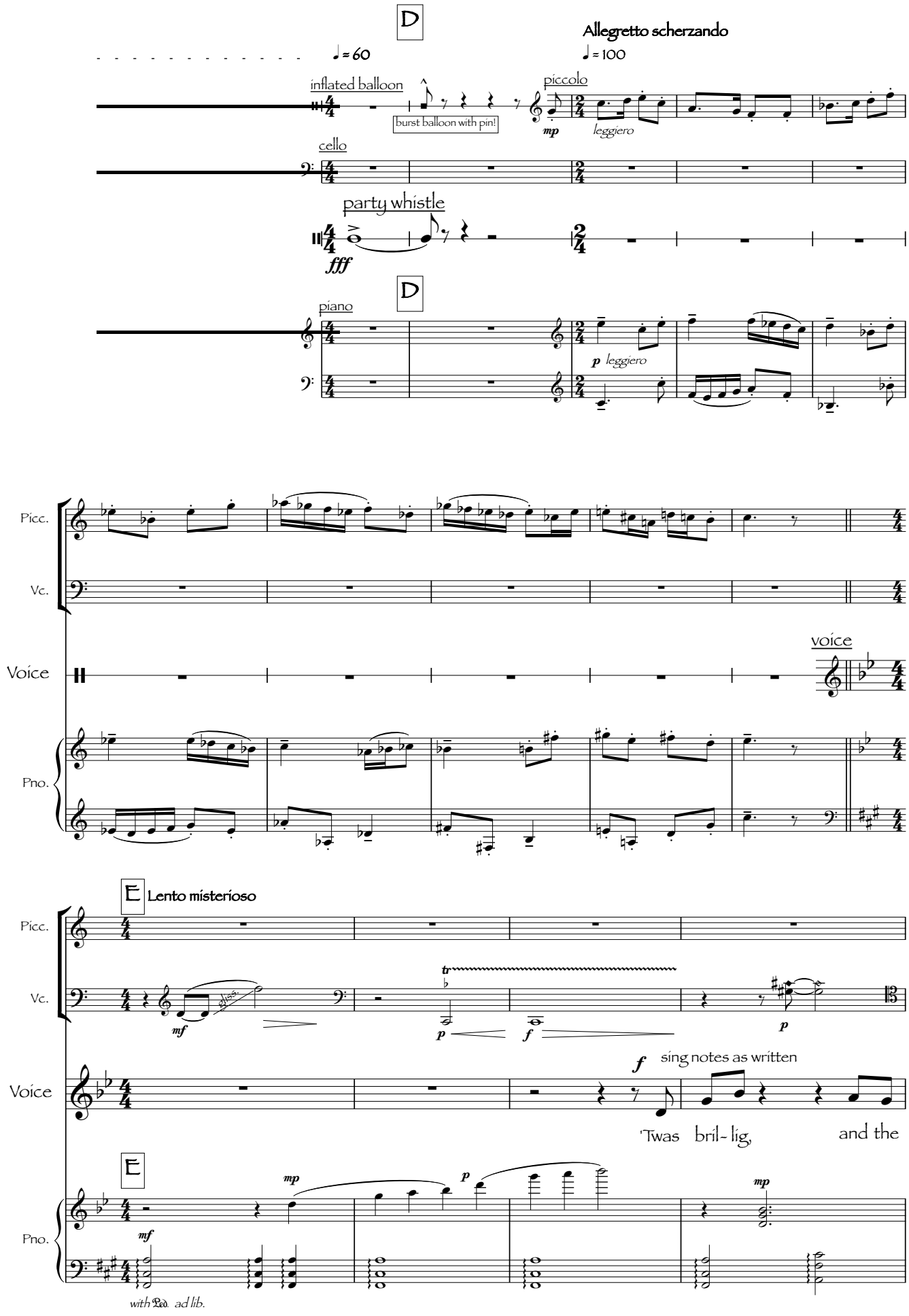

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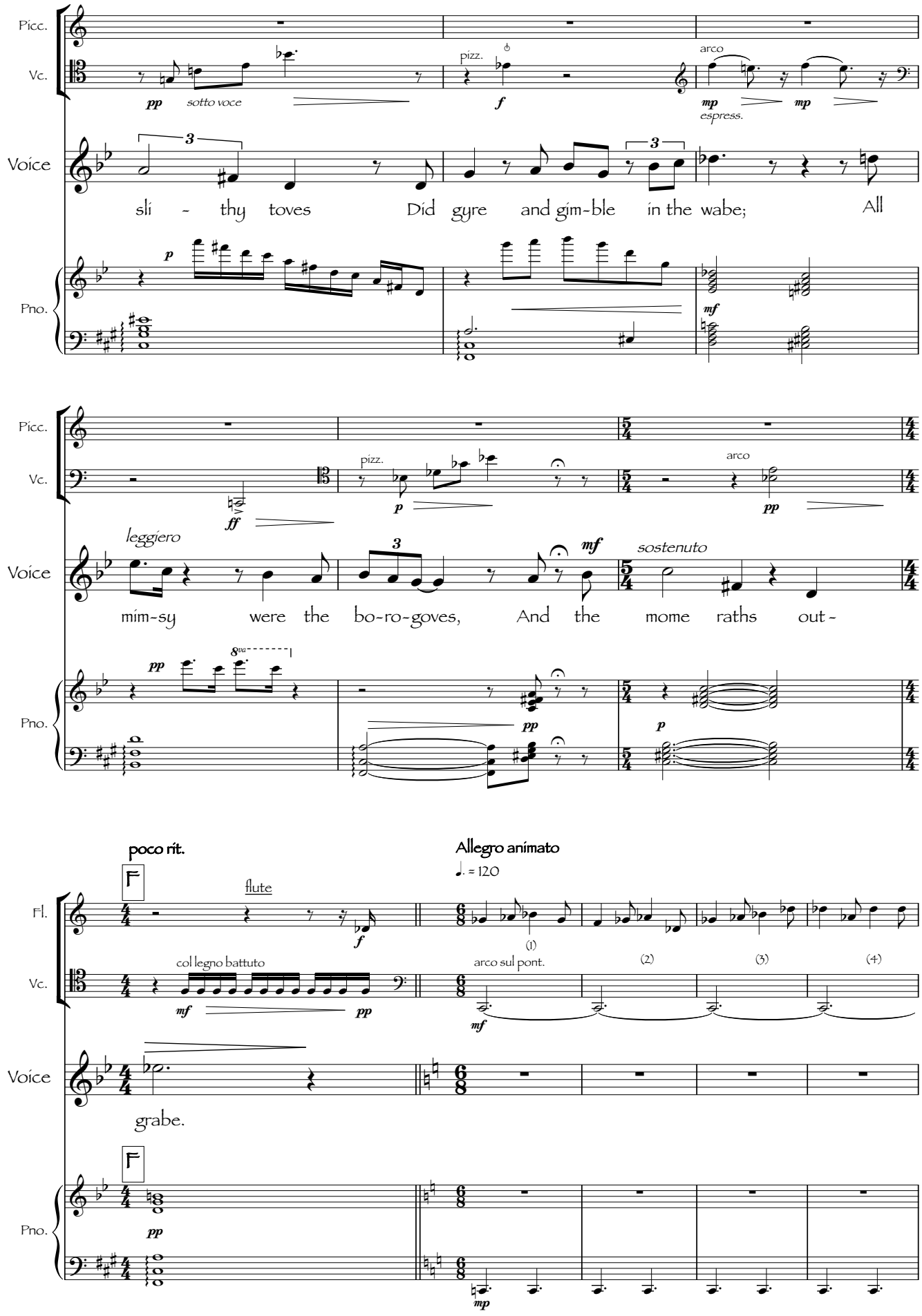

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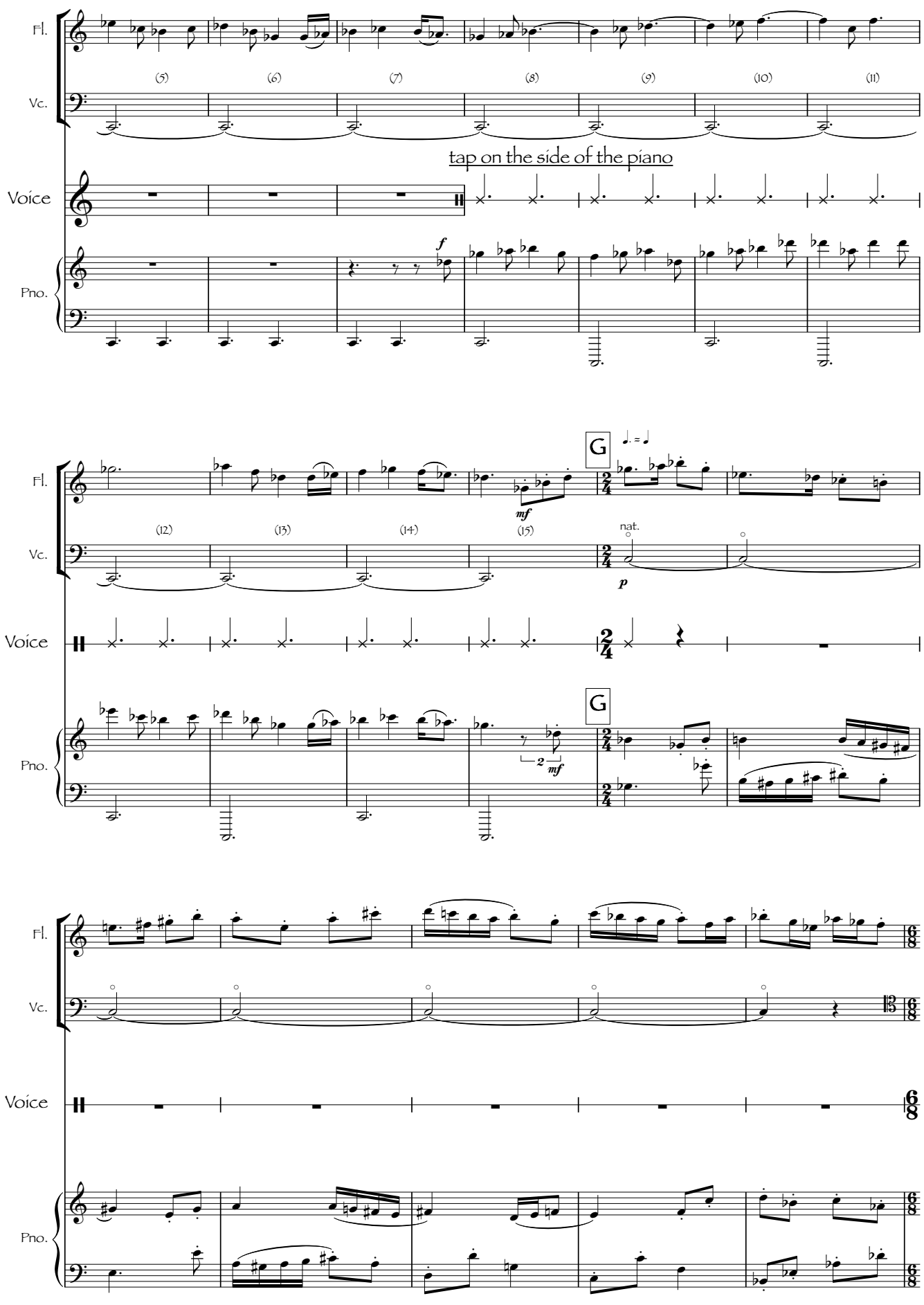

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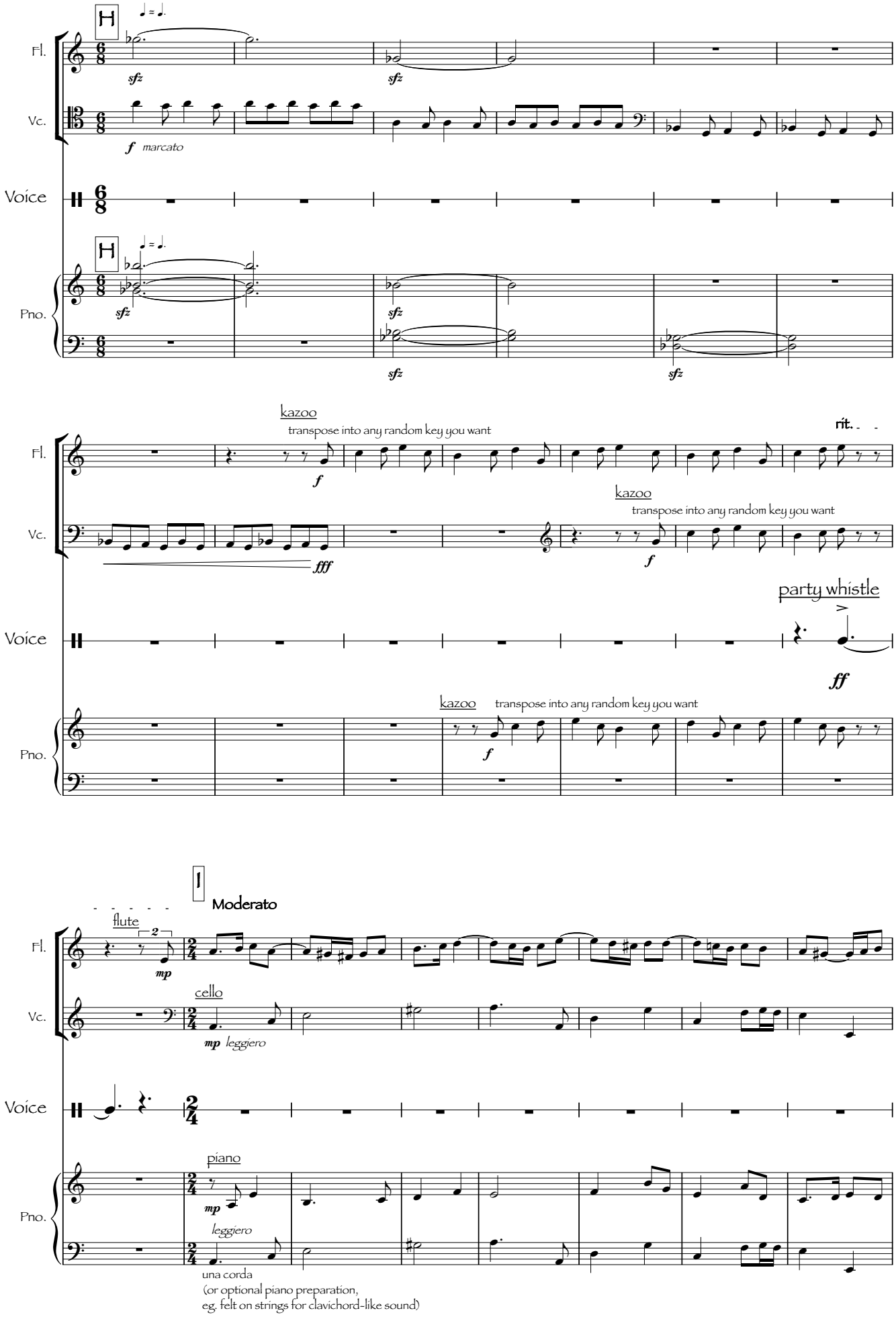

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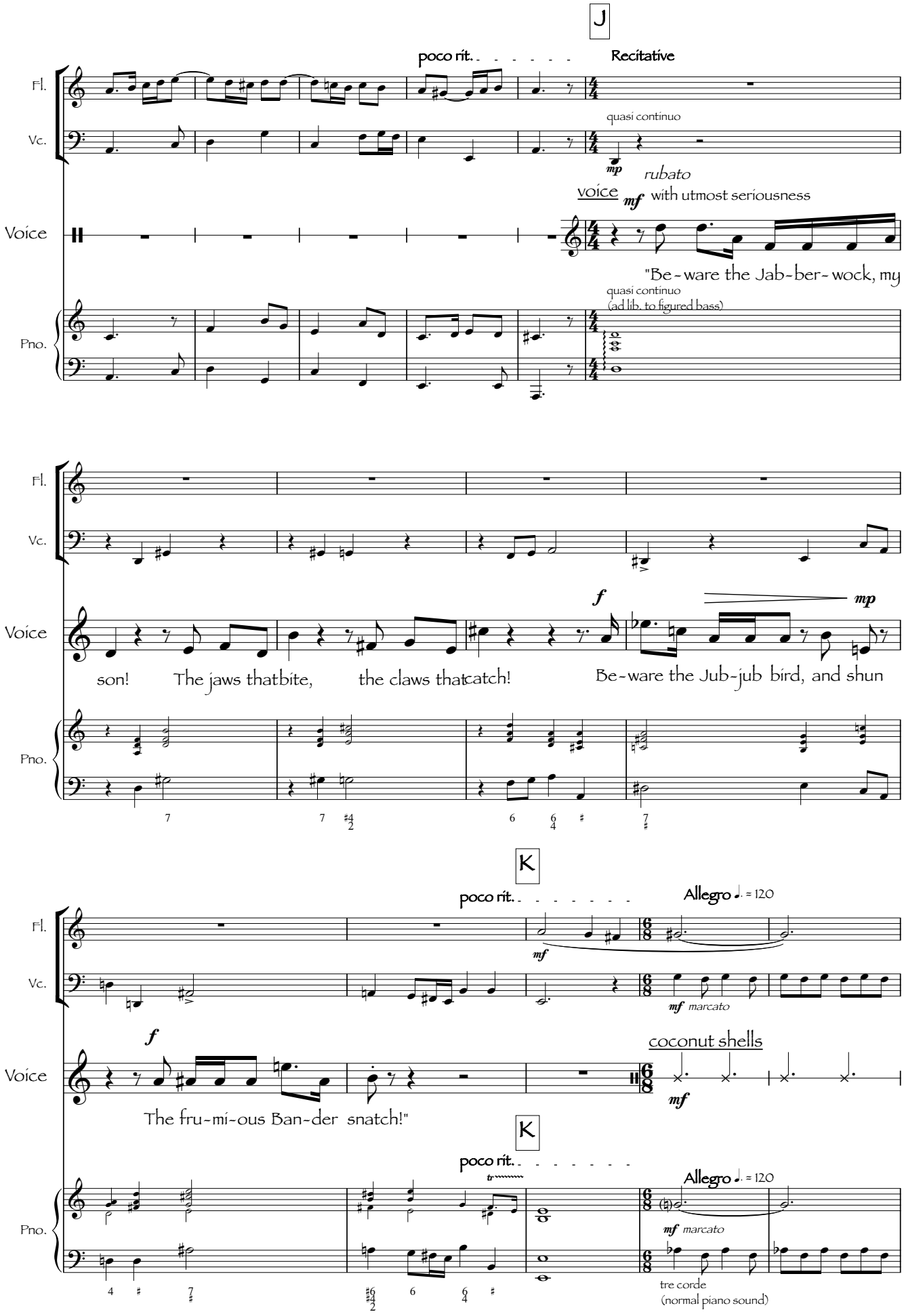

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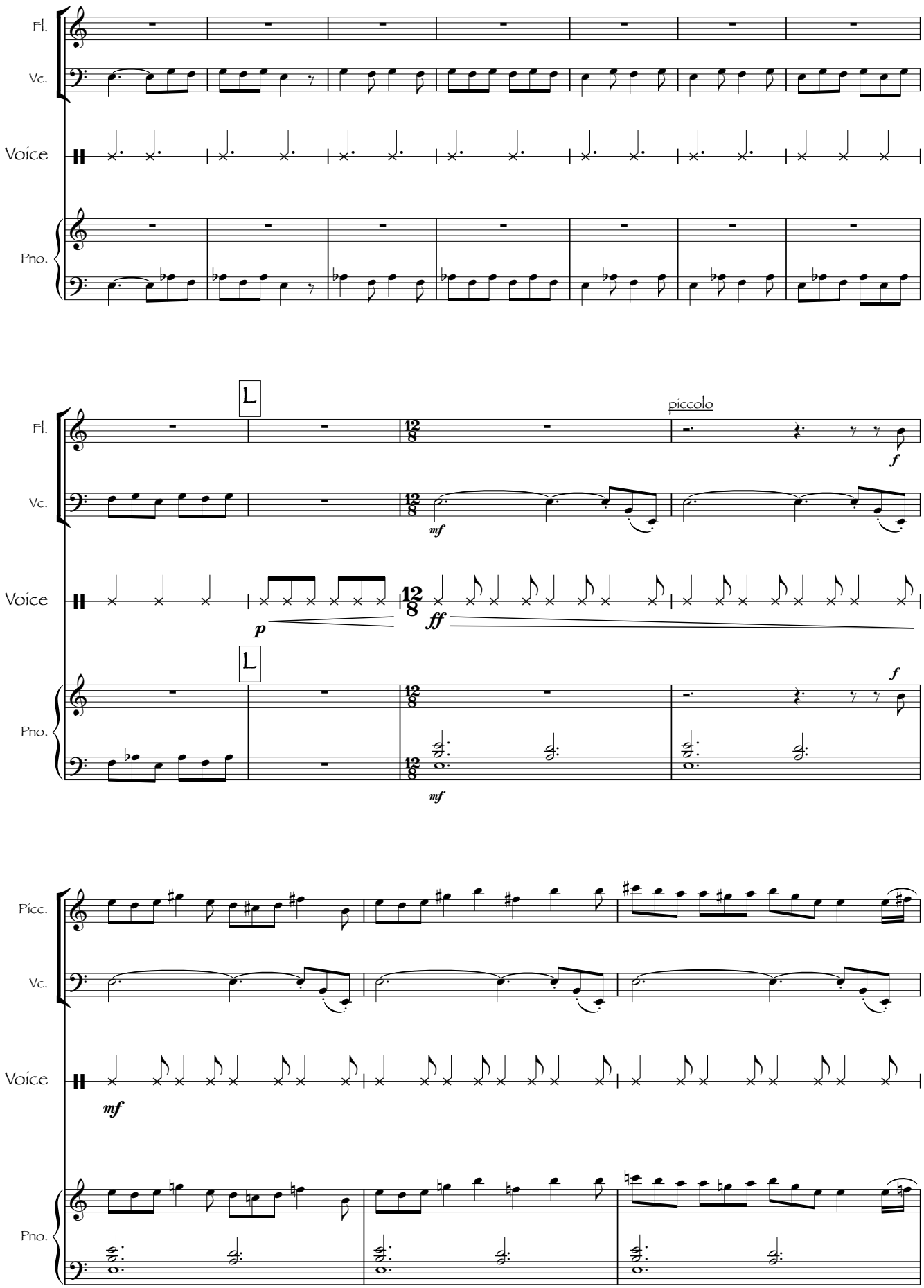

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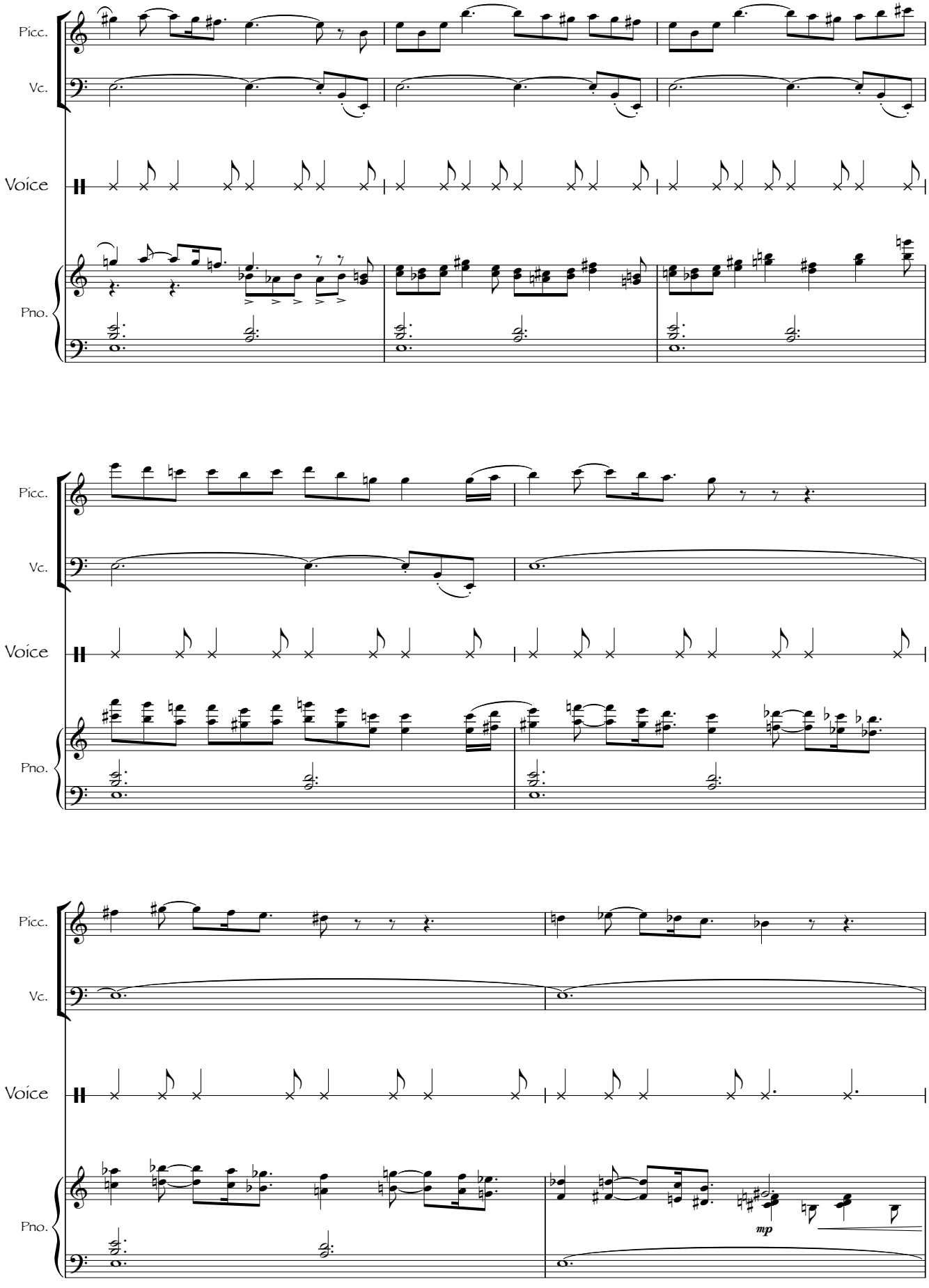

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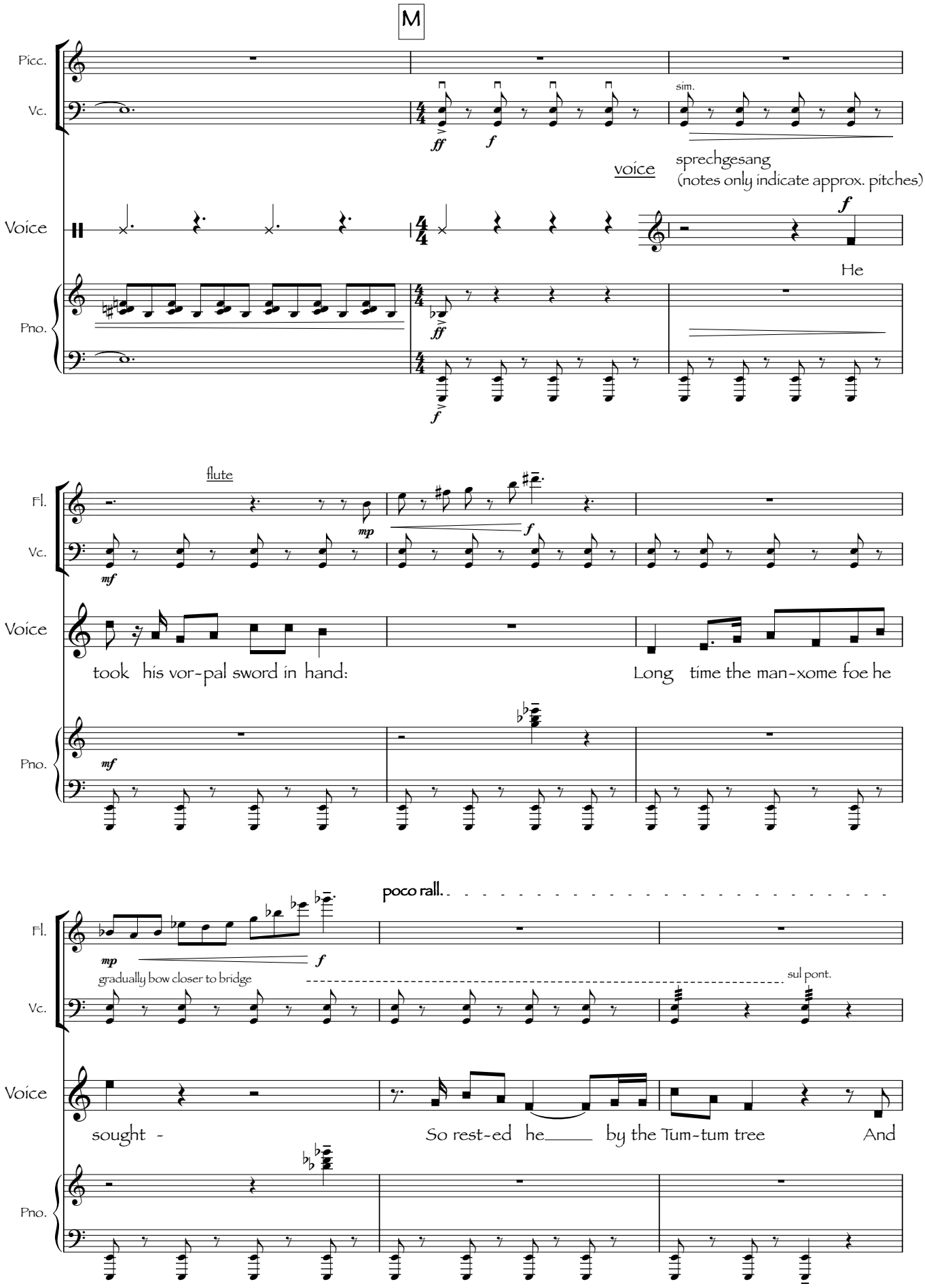

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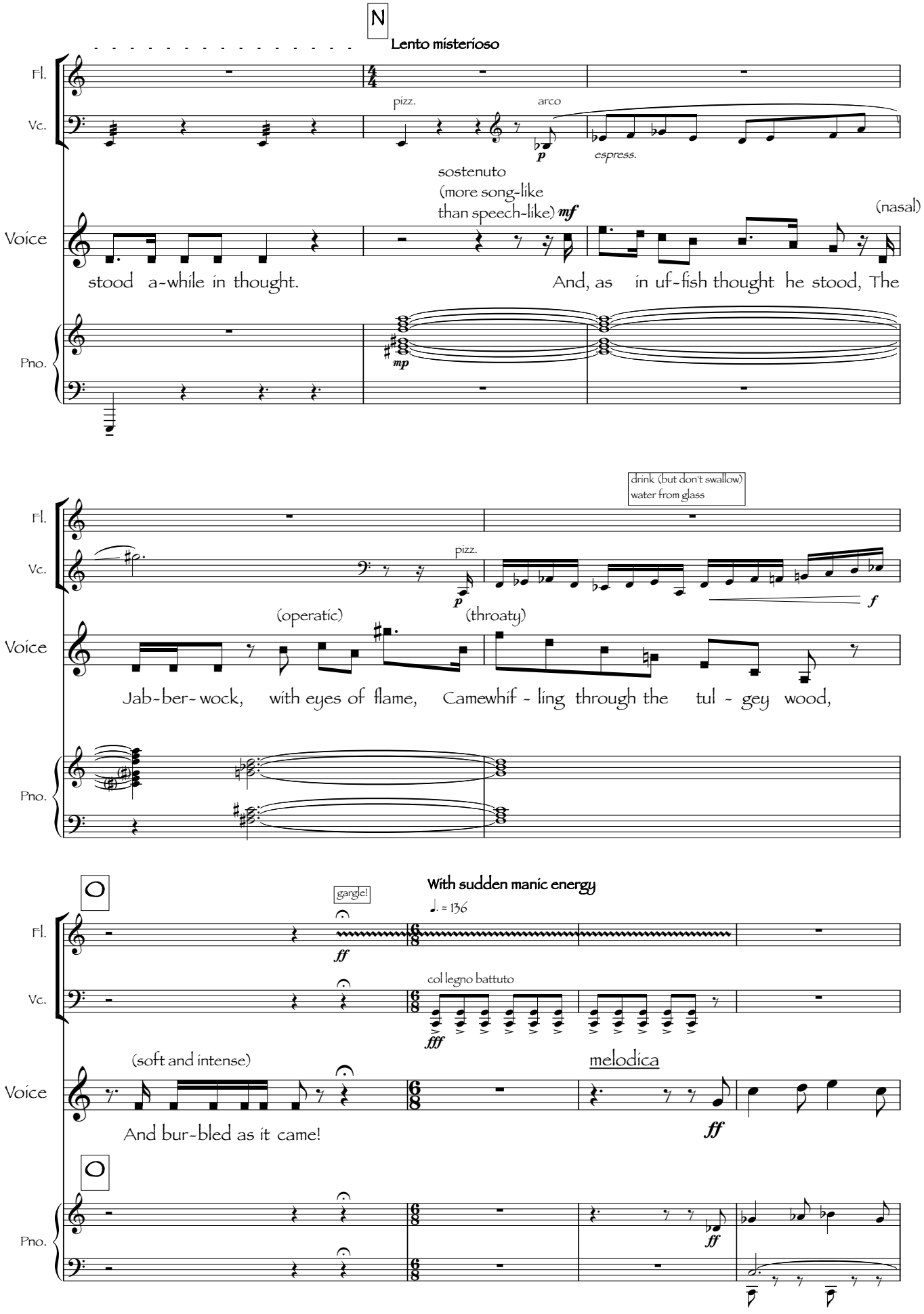

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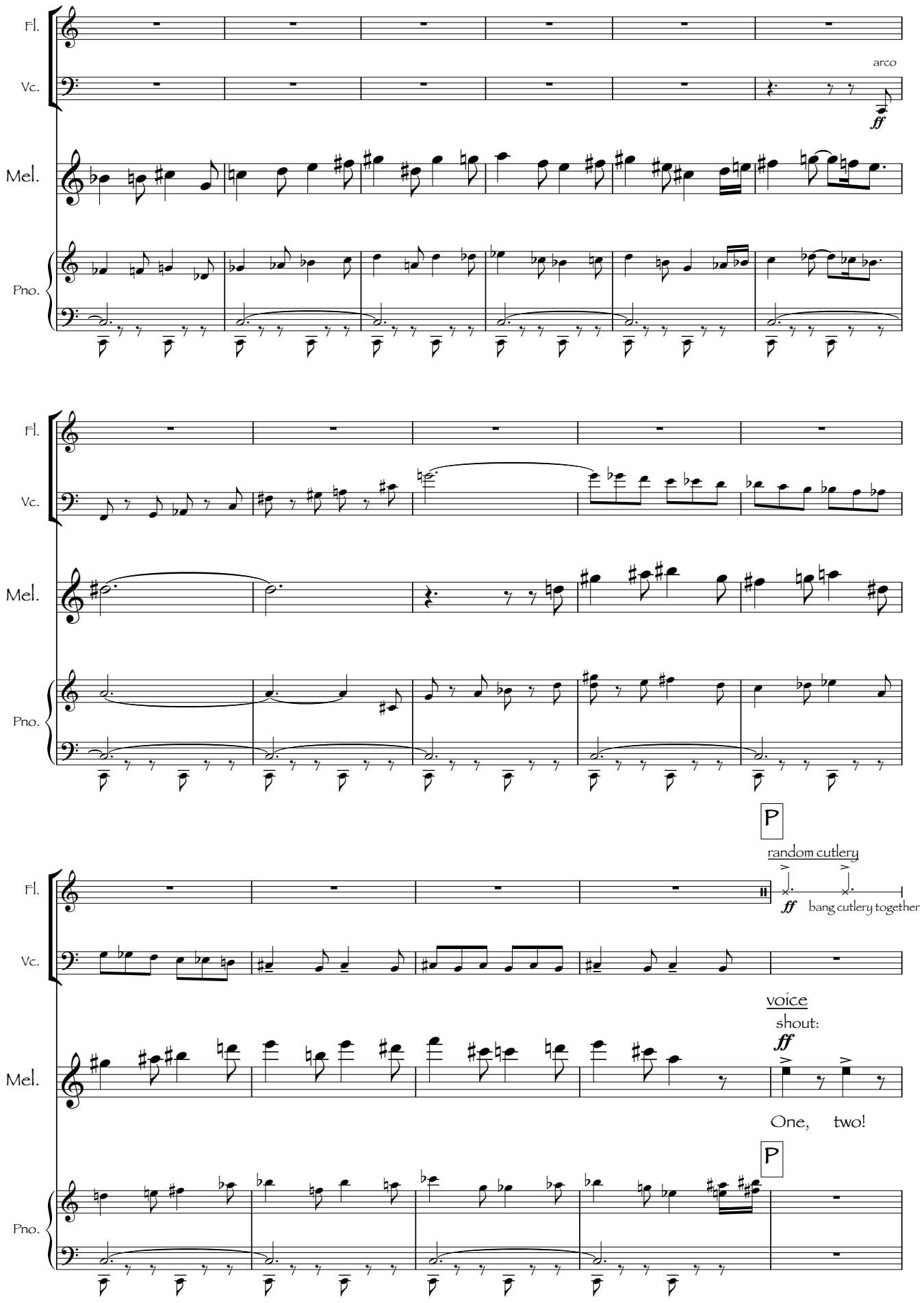

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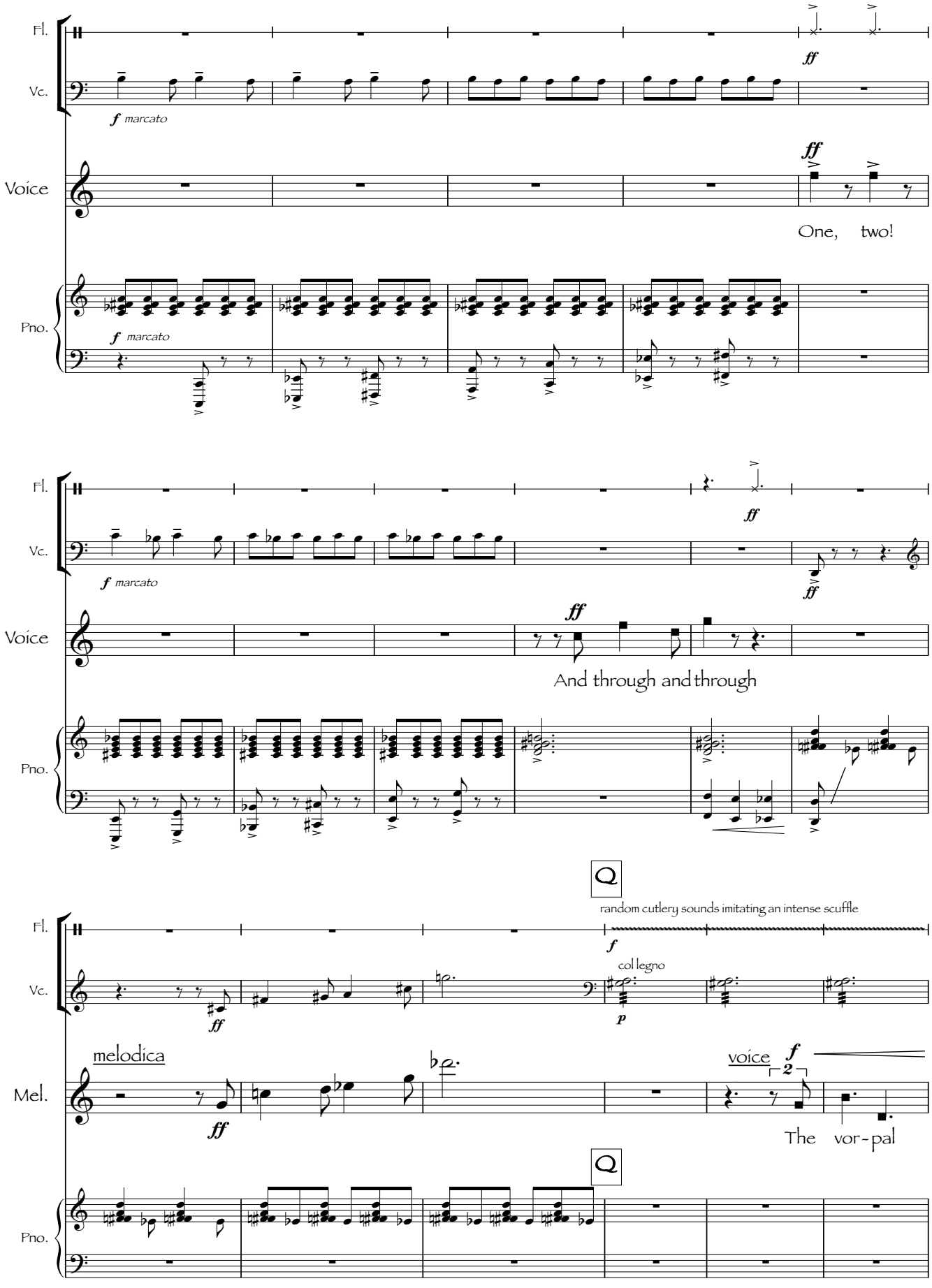

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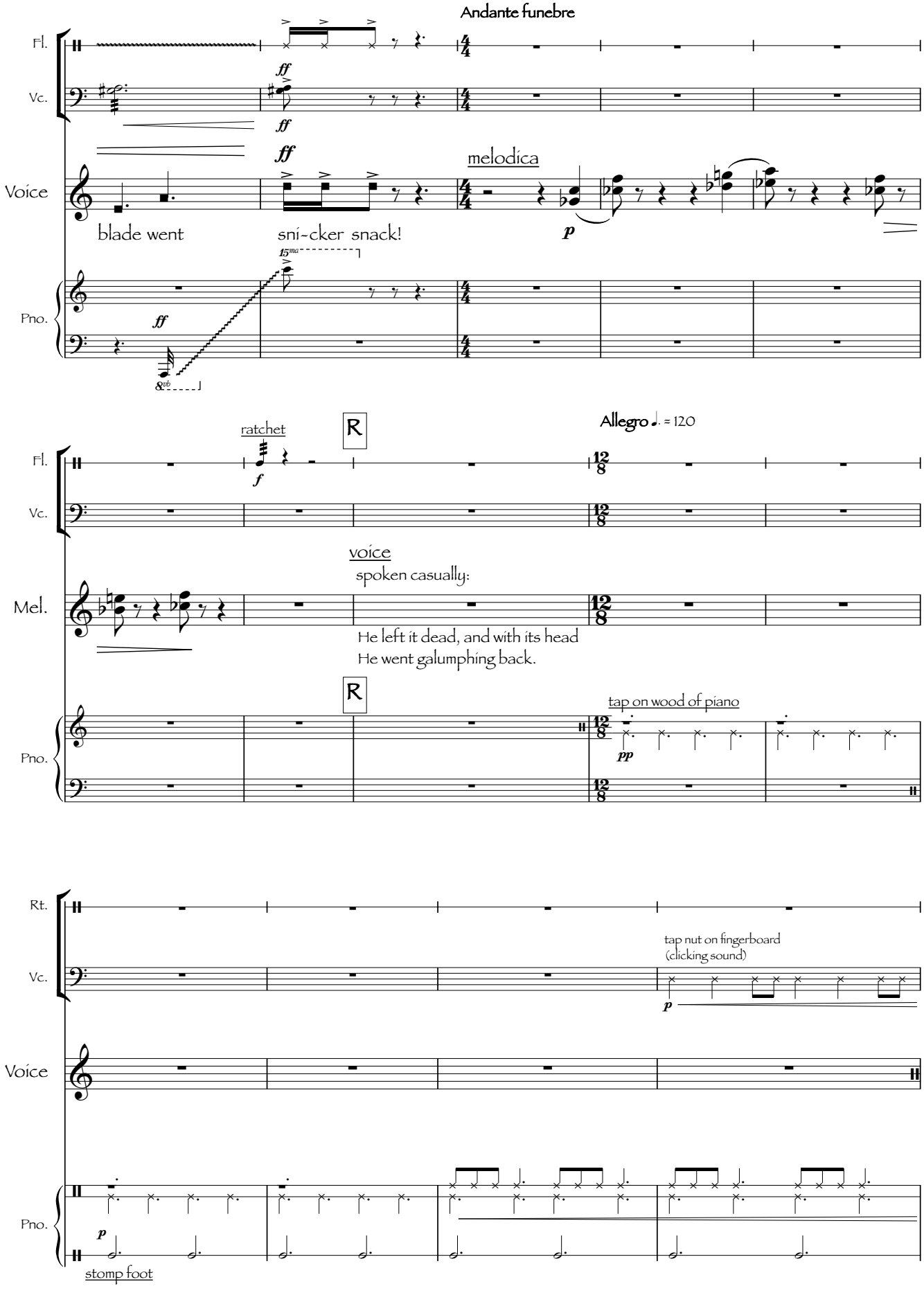

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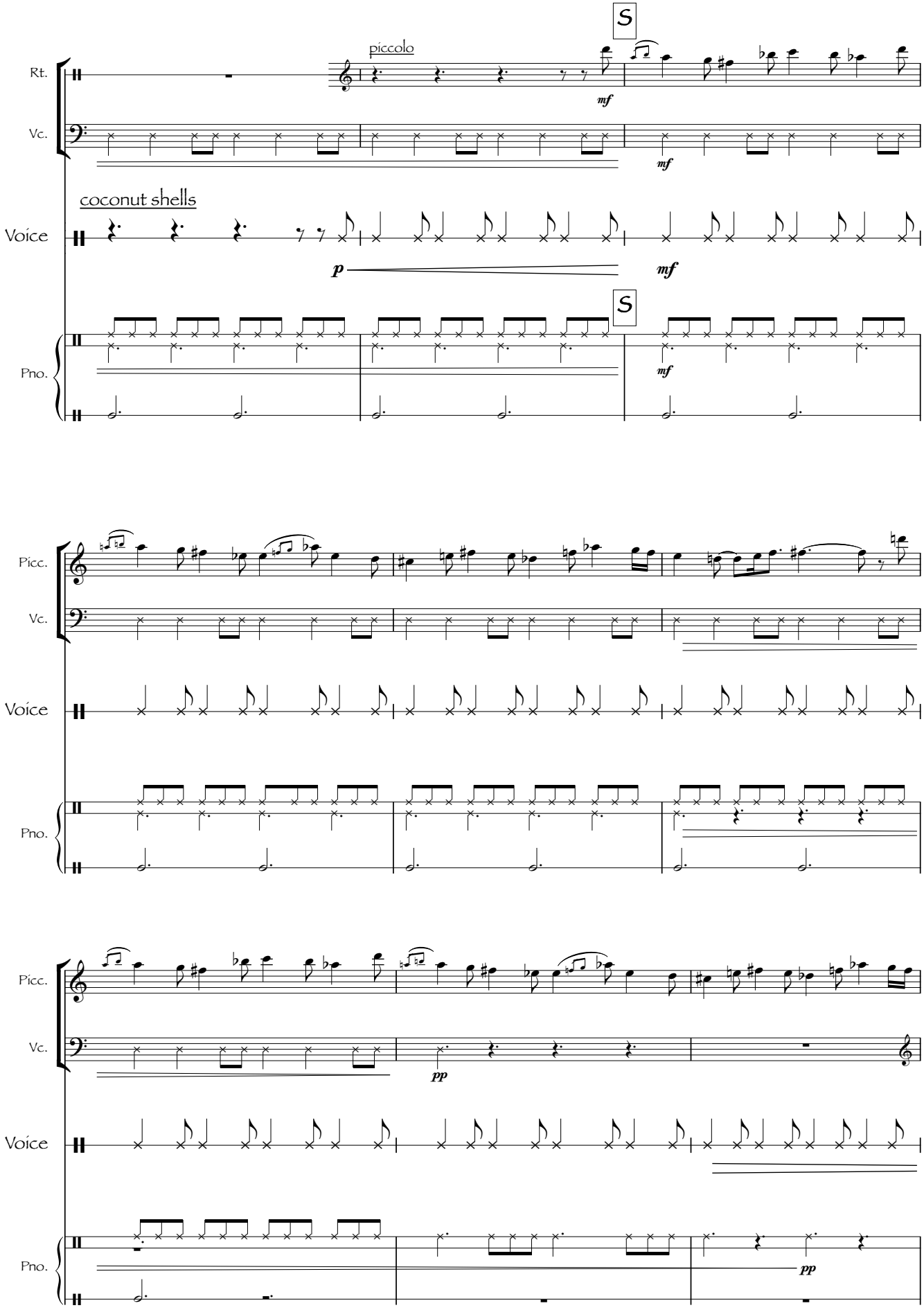

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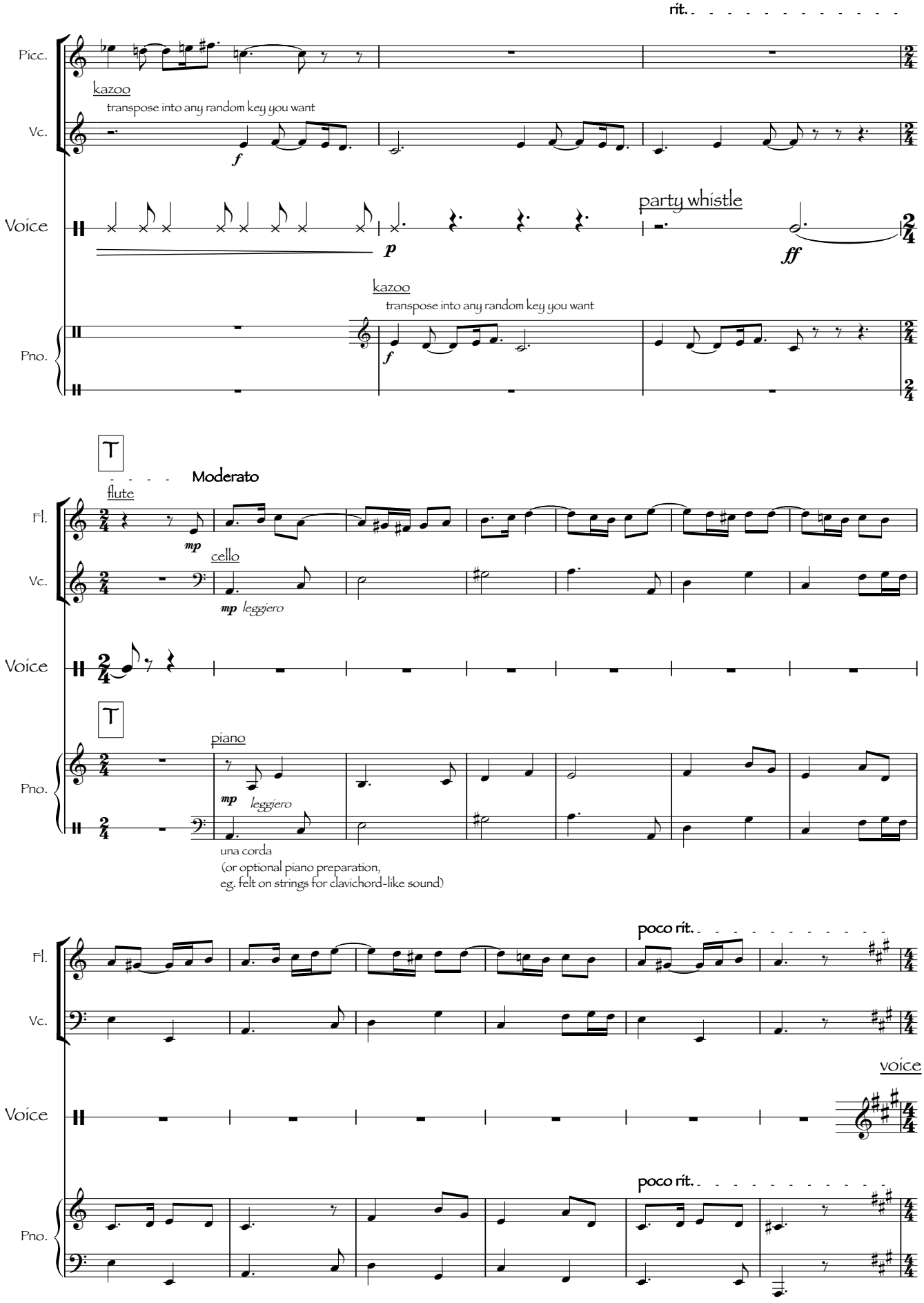

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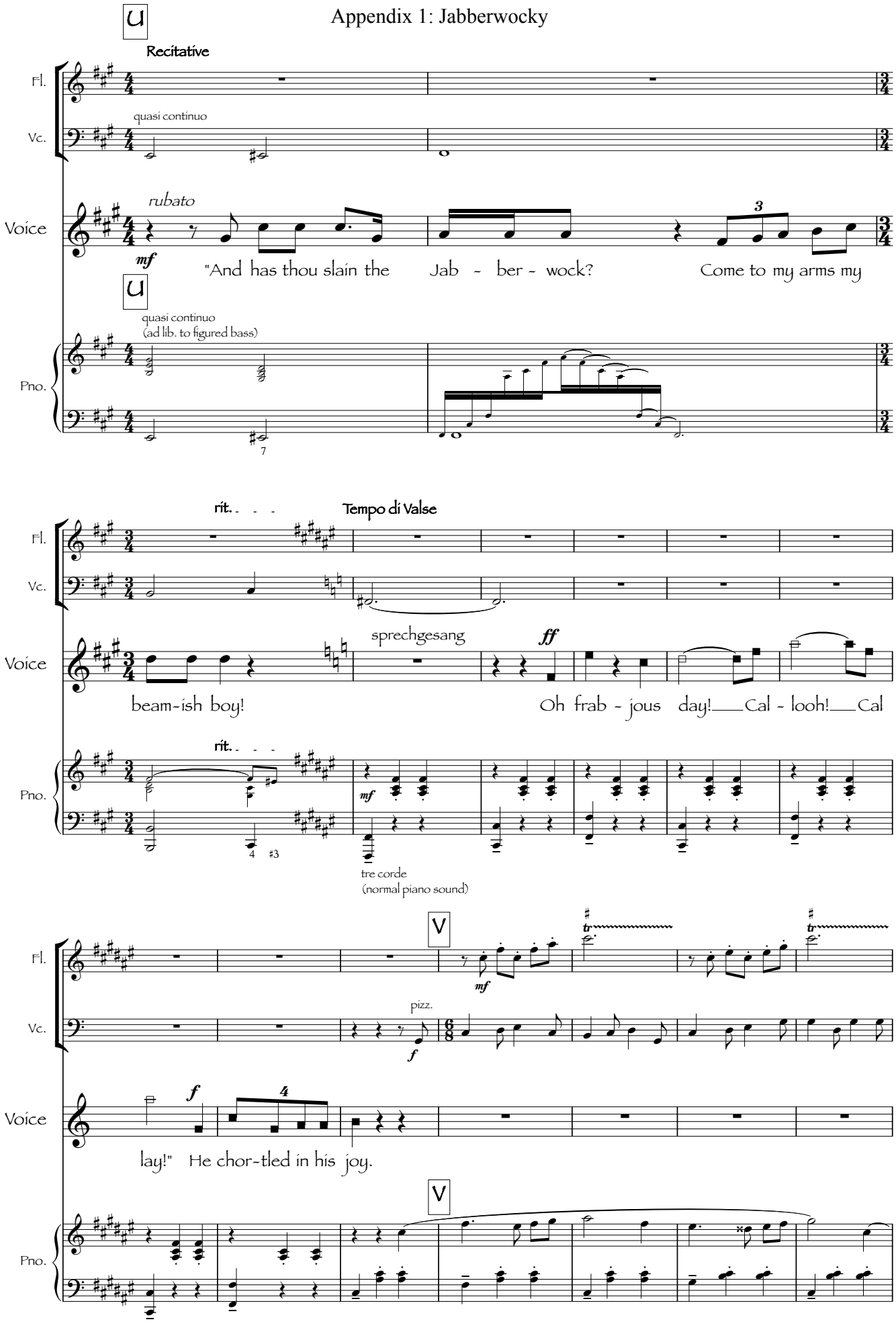

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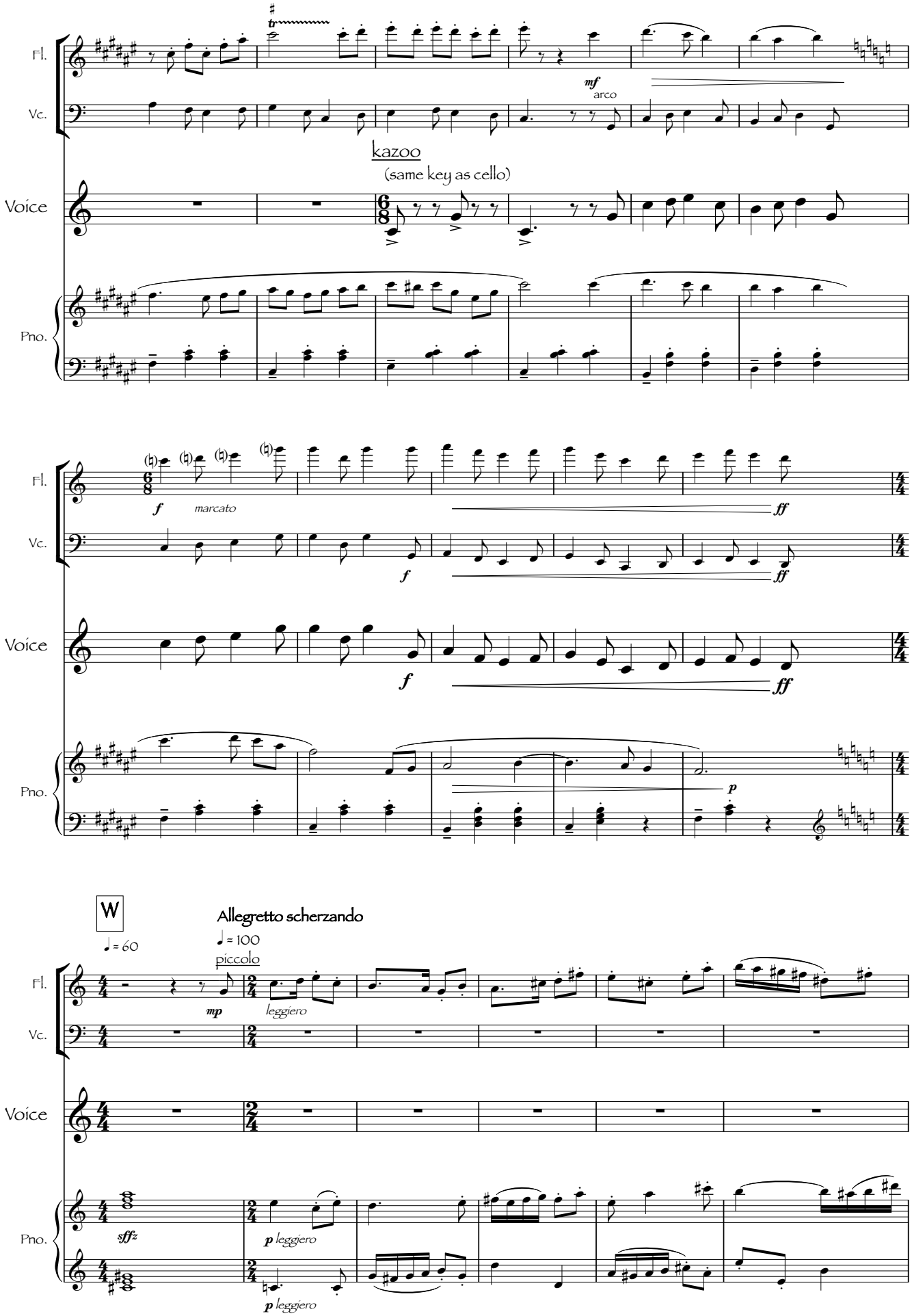

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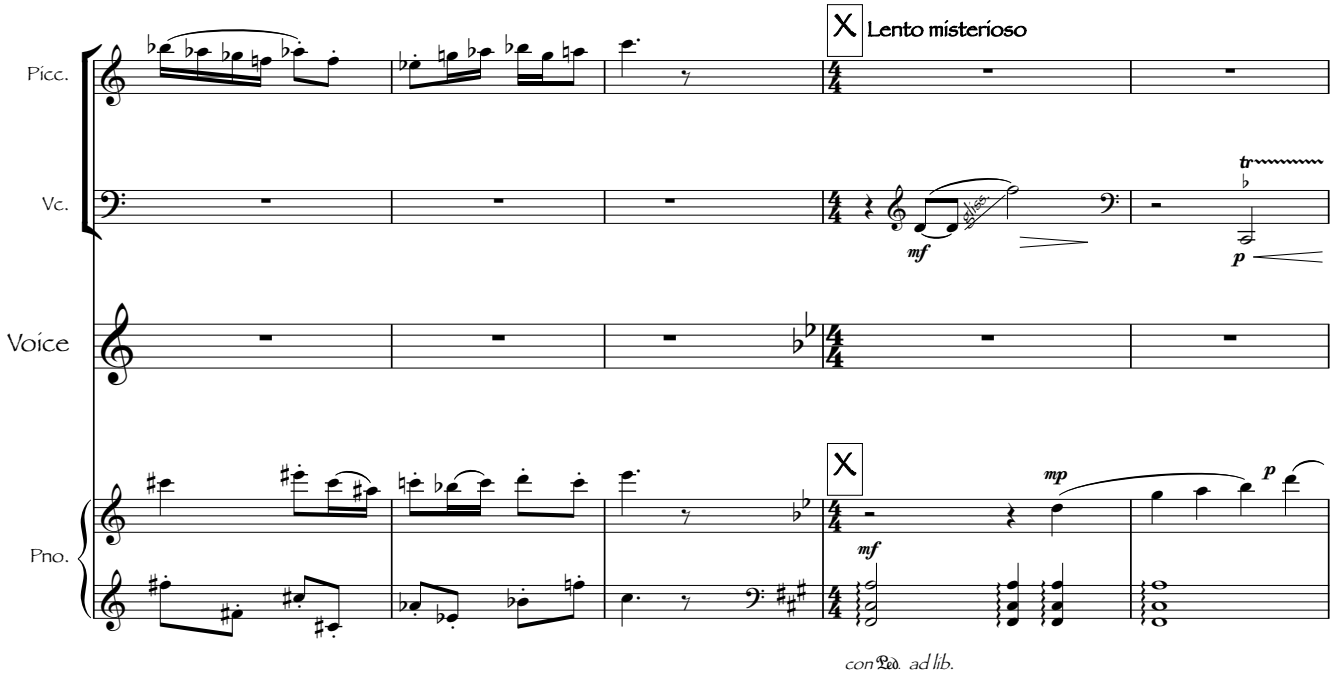
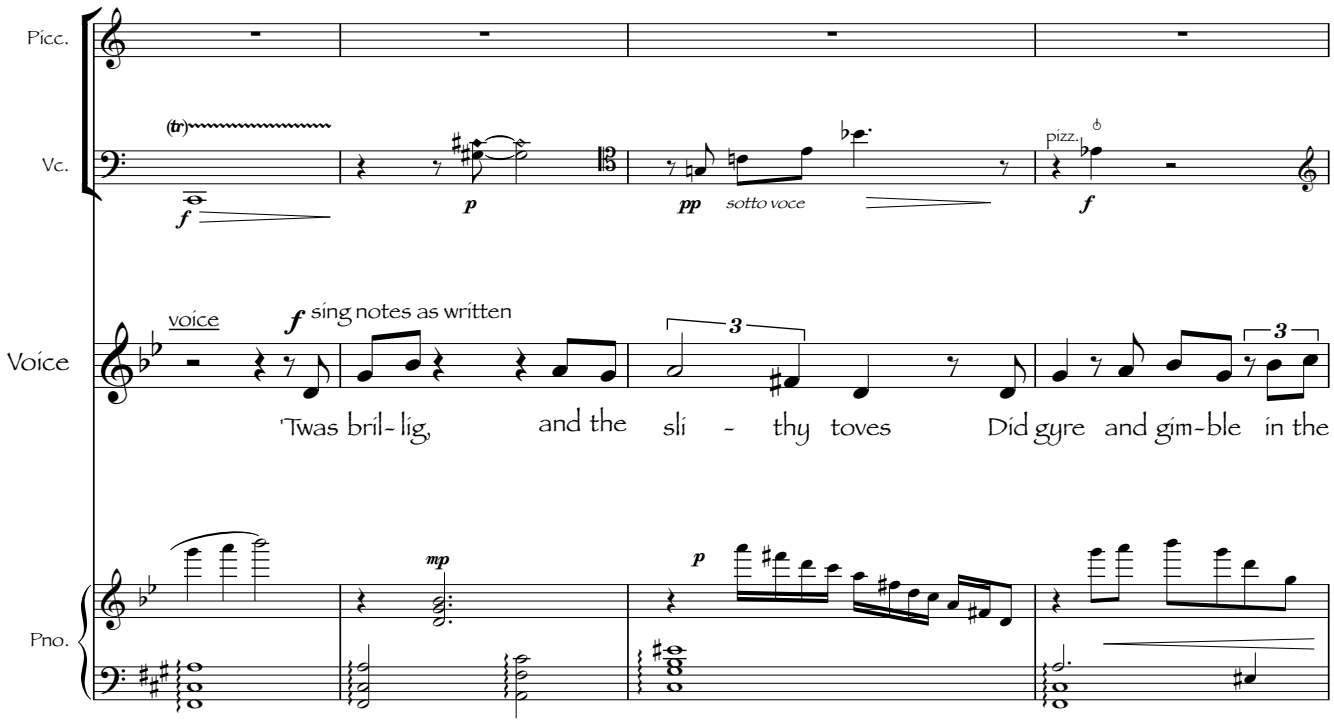
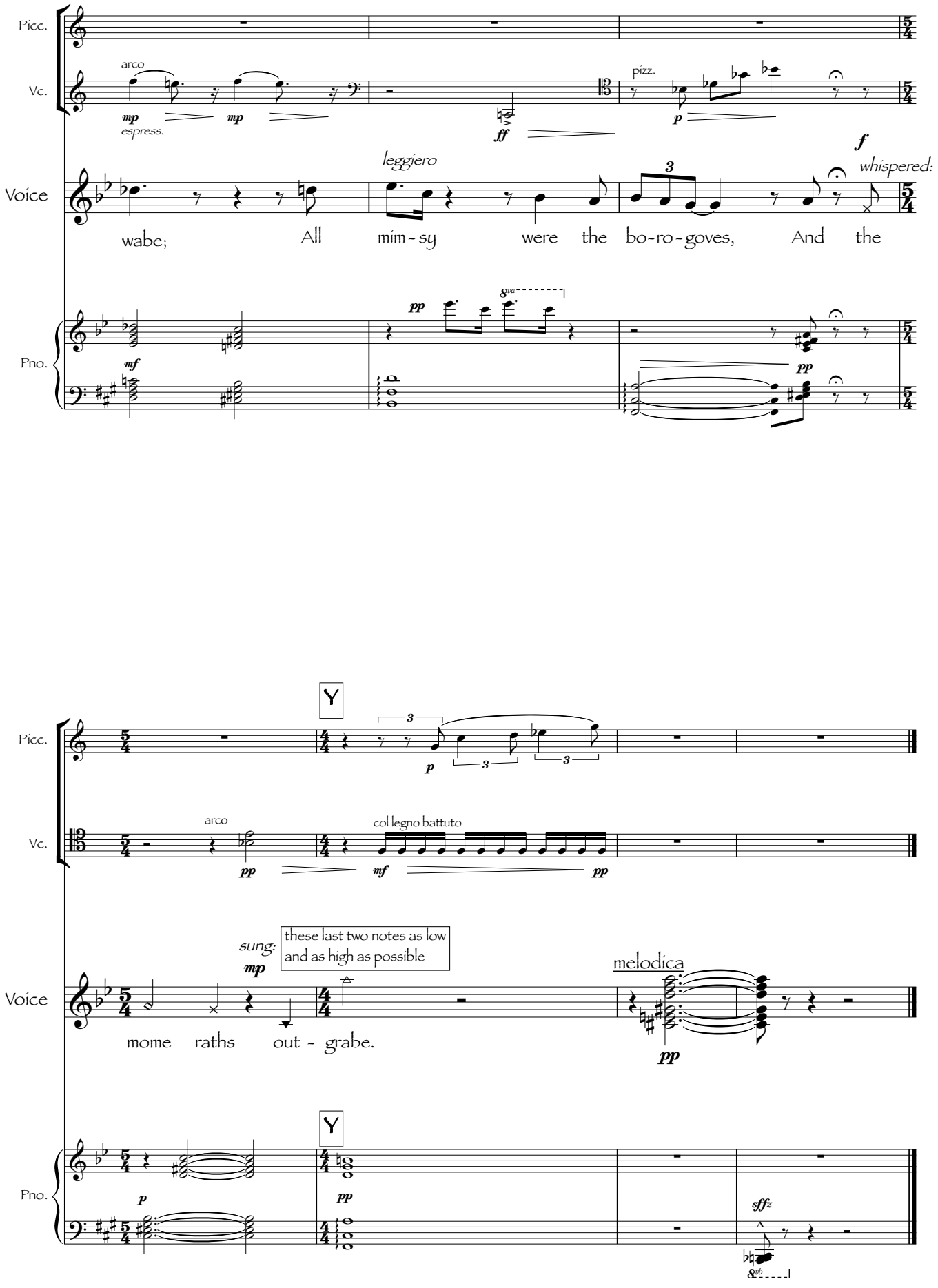




Appendix 1: Jabberwocky



APPENDIX 2

Tiramisu

for string orchestra

with optional narrator

David John Lang

2014

Tiramisu

Commissioned by Elder Hall for the Elder Conservatorium Chamber Orchestra's 2014 concert *Viva L'Italia*.

Special thanks to Claire Oremland for setting up the commission, Lachlan Bramble for directing the orchestra and suggesting the addition of a narrator, Laura Evans for being a 'violin consultant' during the composition process, and Carl Crossin for embracing the role of narrator (complete with chef's outfit and Italian accent) at the premiere.

for Lachlan Bramble and the Elder Conservatorium Chamber Orchestra

Tiramisu

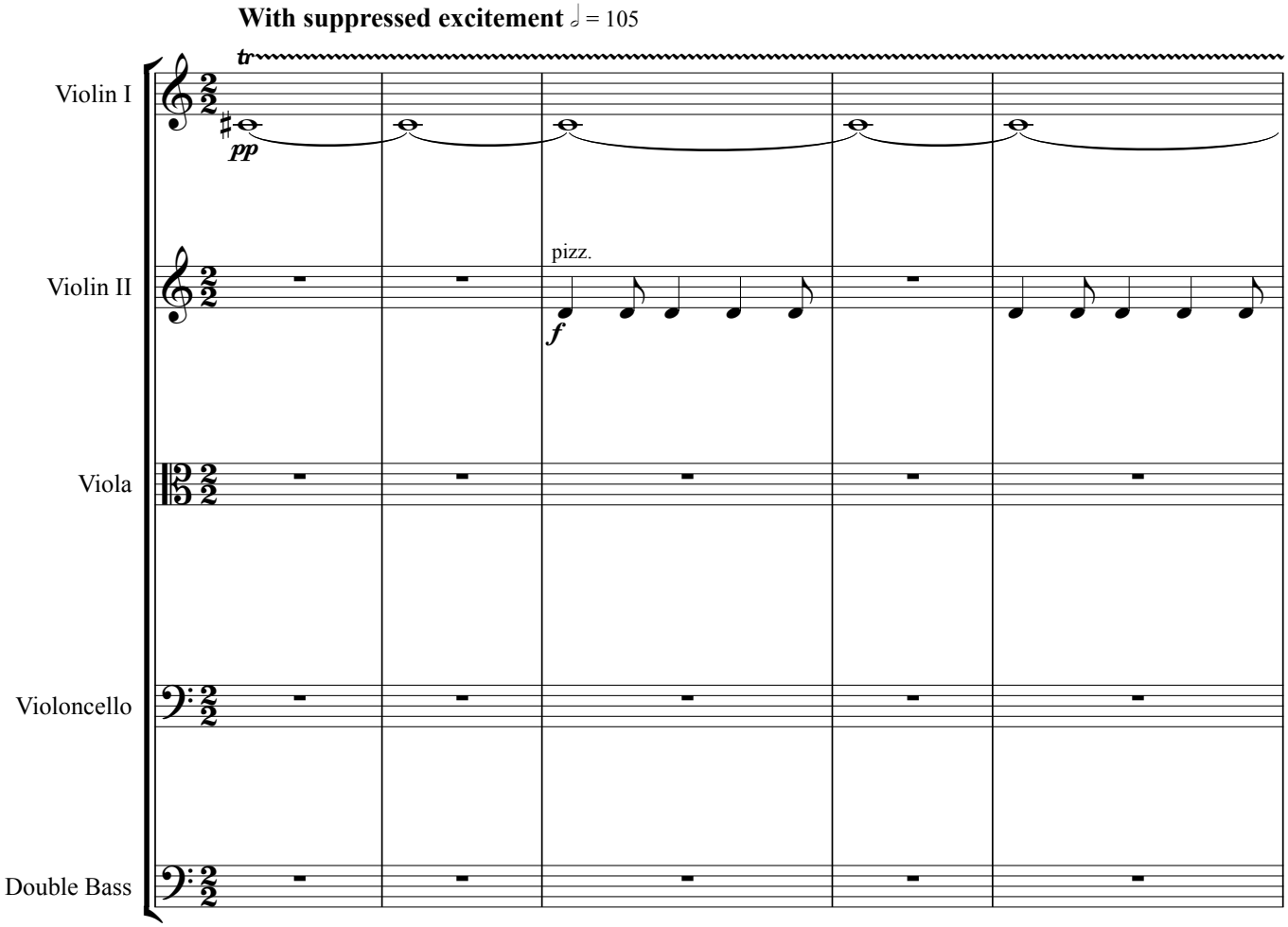
David John Lang

Ingredients

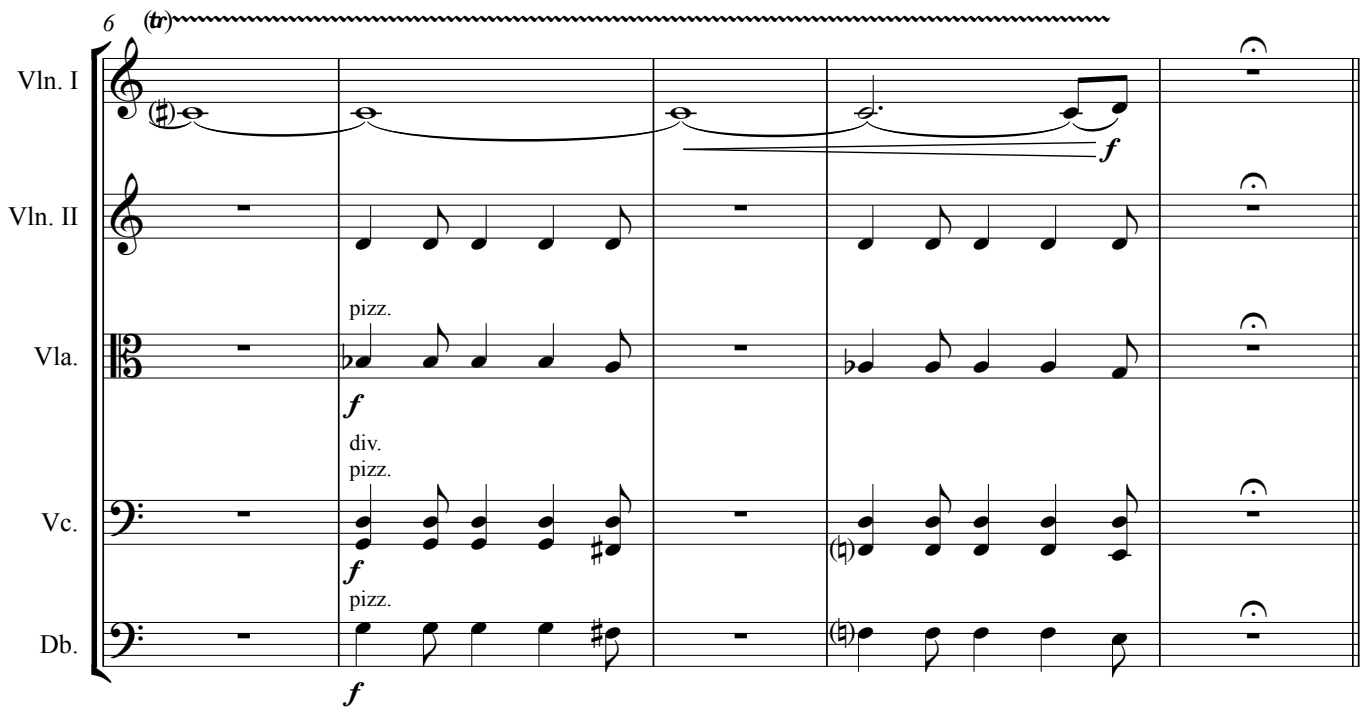
Buona sera!
How do you like the meal so far, eh?
You're not full yet, I hope.
Room for a little more?

I am the head-chef and my name is Carlo.
And tonight I make for you a very special Italian dessert,
so you all go home singing.
This is *tiramisu*.

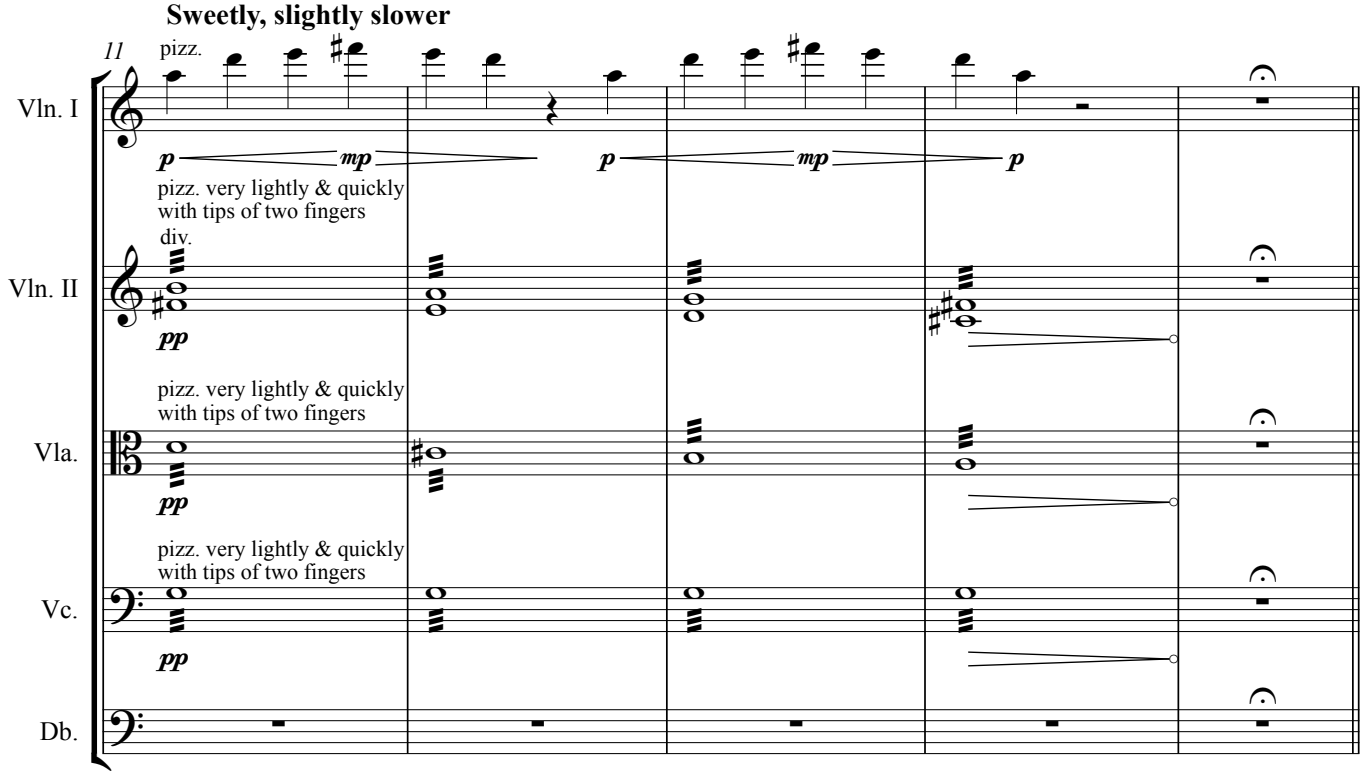
Now, my cooks are ready and waiting.
Let's first make sure we have all the ingredients we need.
Most important of all is the espresso, the coffee…



Appendix 2: Tiramisu

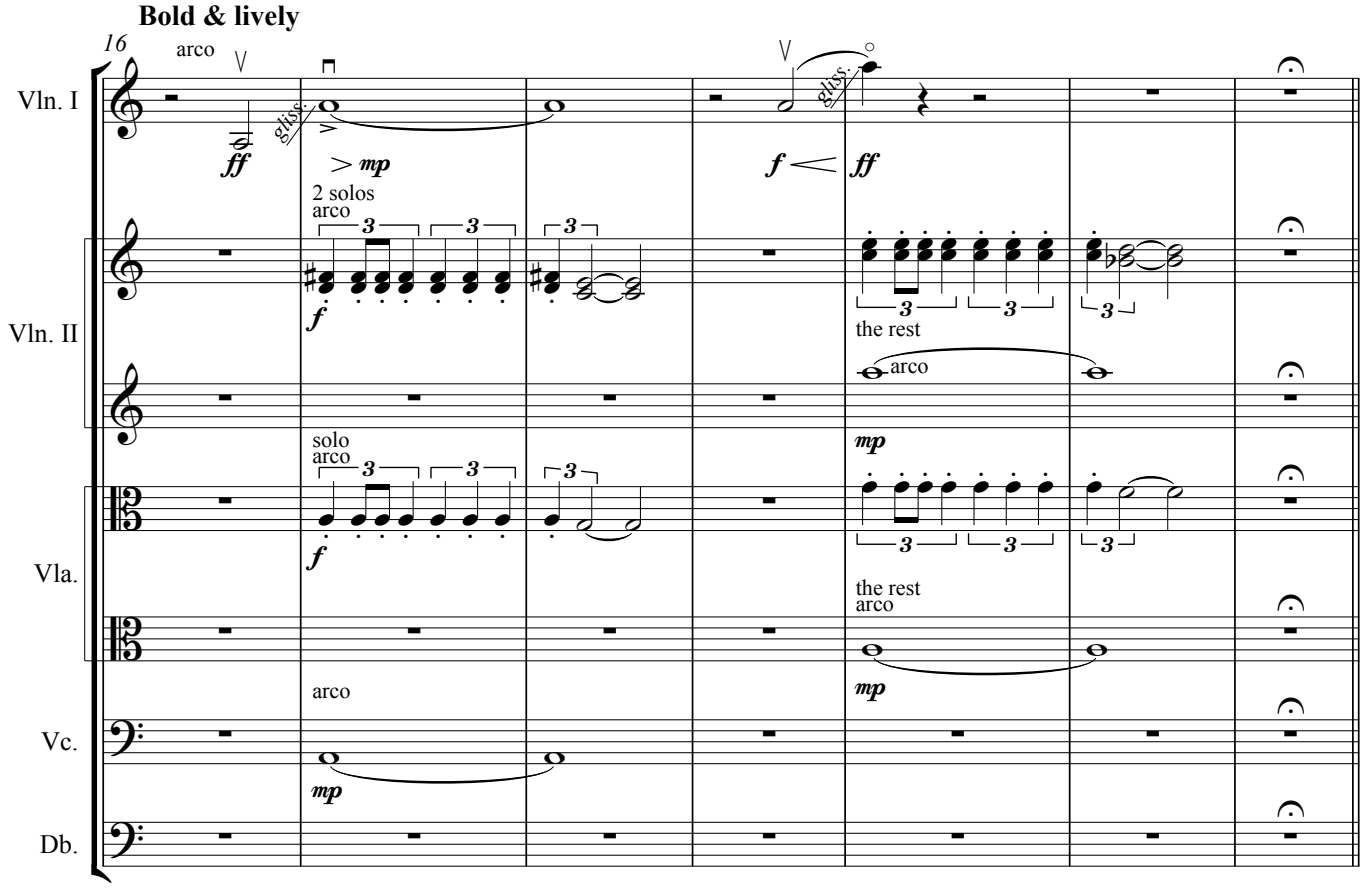


Then we need about three-quarters of a cup of castor sugar, *dolce*...

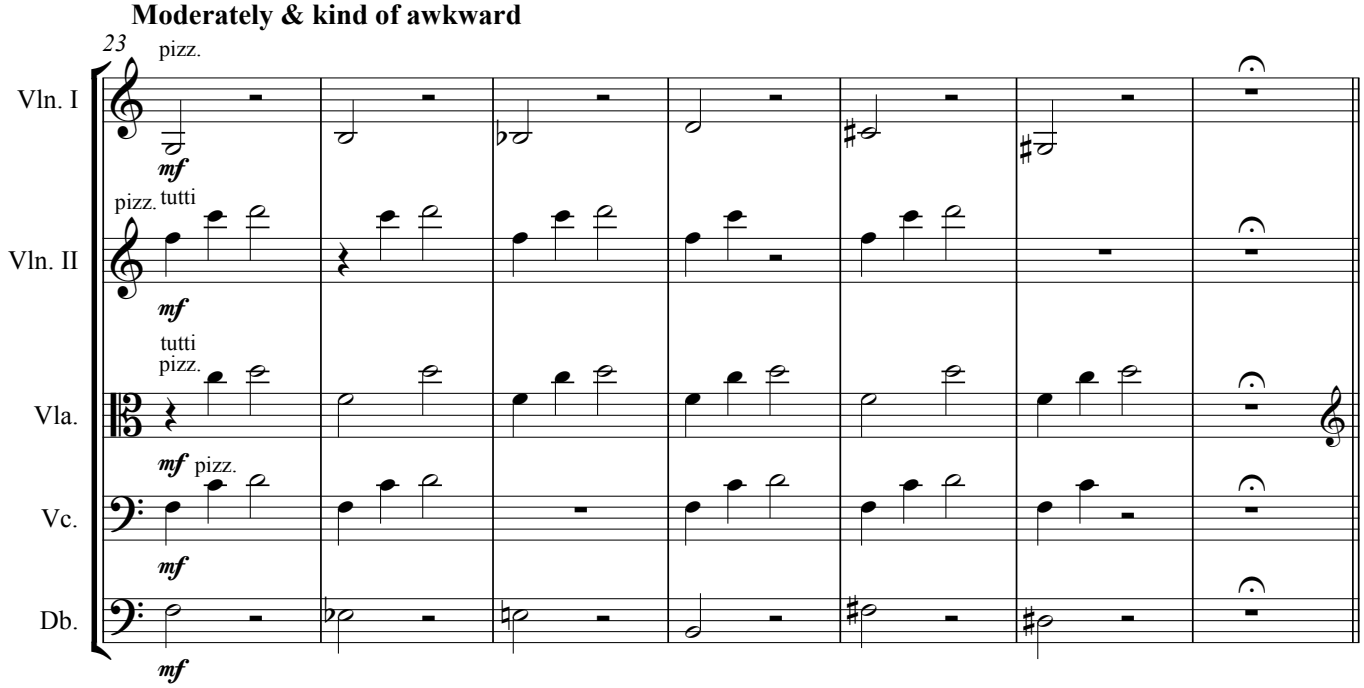


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

Now… you don't have to put alcohol, but tonight we will.
We're going to use Frangelico, about half a cup.
We want this to be a tiramisu *con forza*!

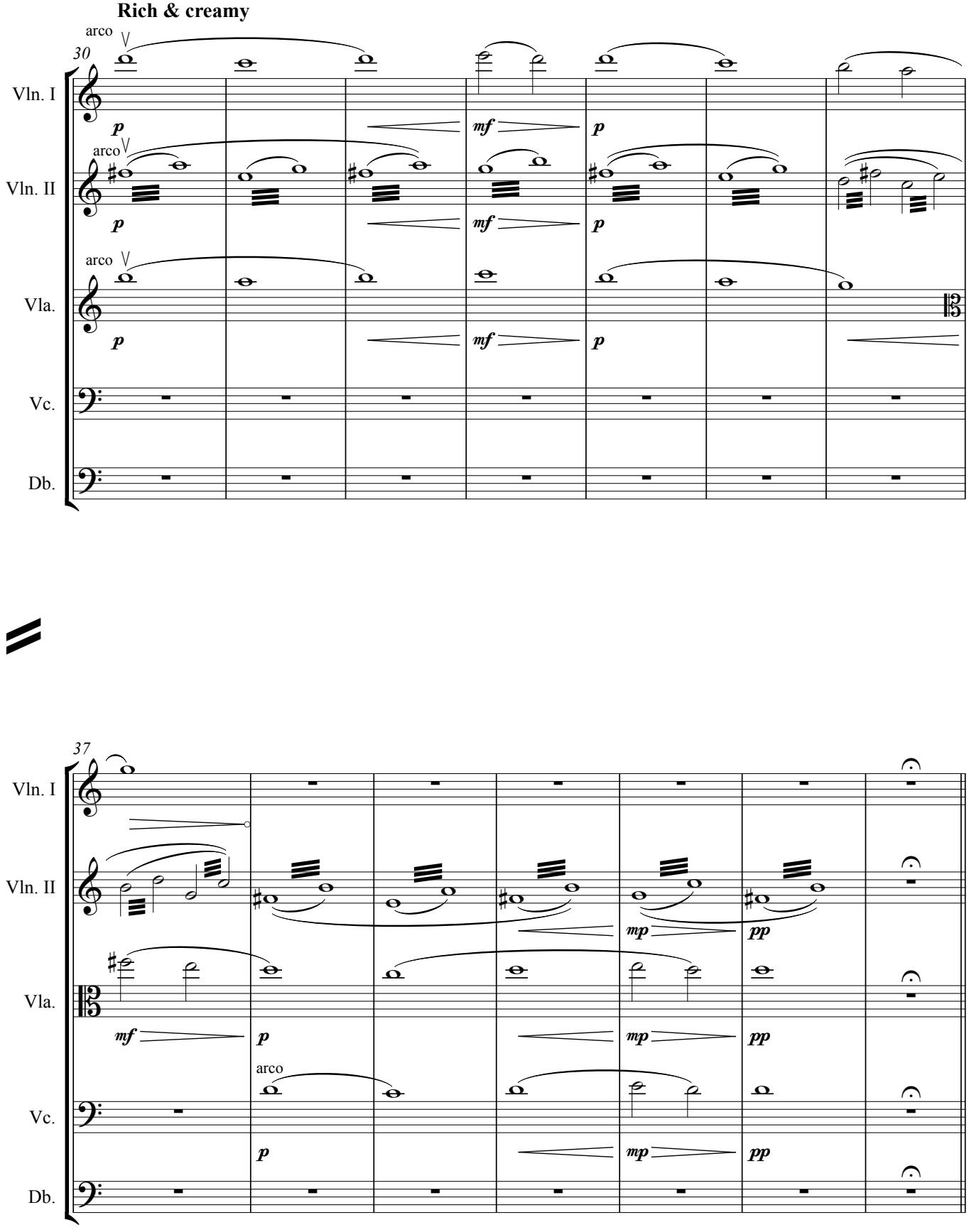


We also need six eggs…



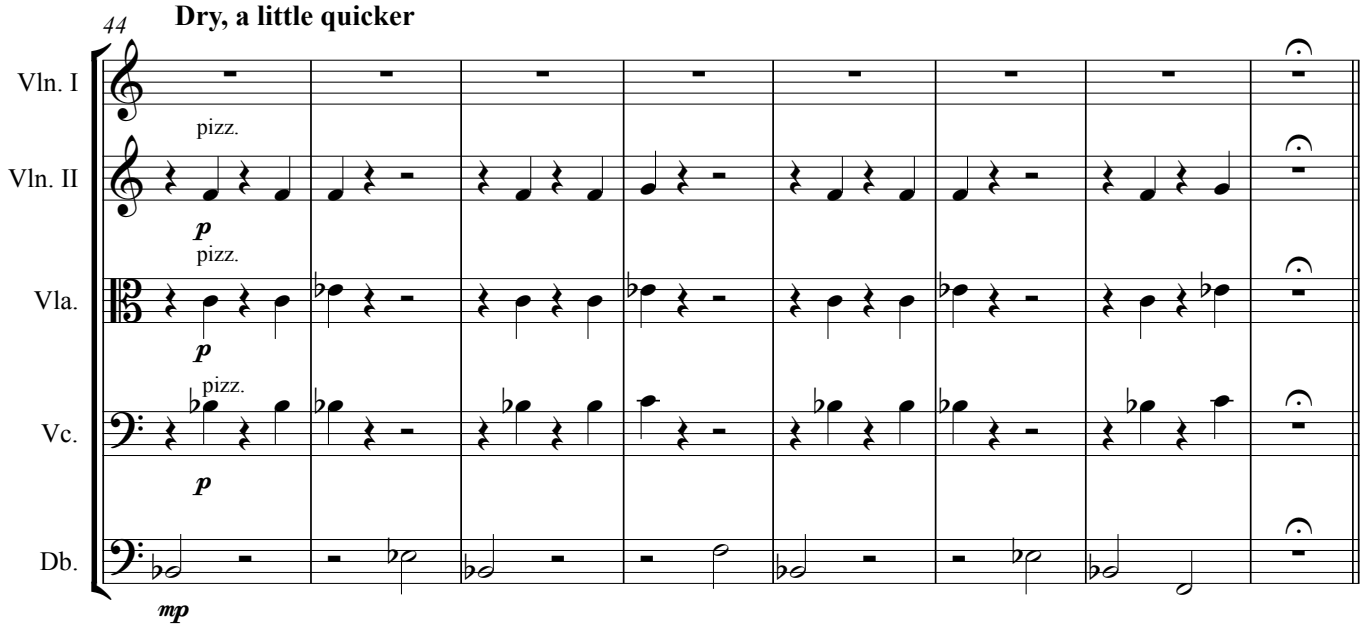
Appendix 2: Tiramisu

And – *piano* –
five hundred grams of the most delicious, creamy mascarpone…
mmm…

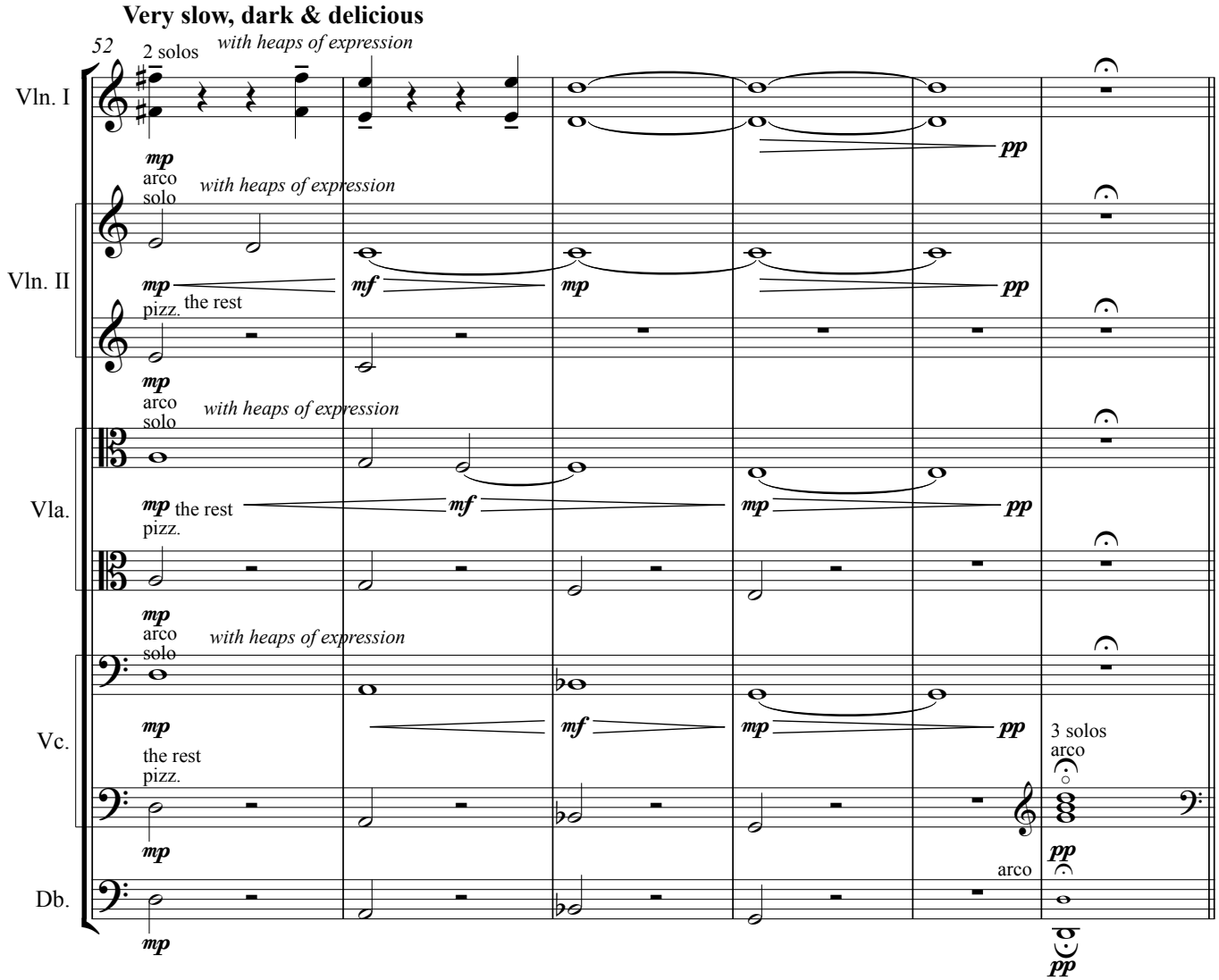


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

For the cake part of the dessert,
we need twenty or so savoiardi biscuits, *secco e staccato*…



And finally… some rich, dark chocolate, just for the end.



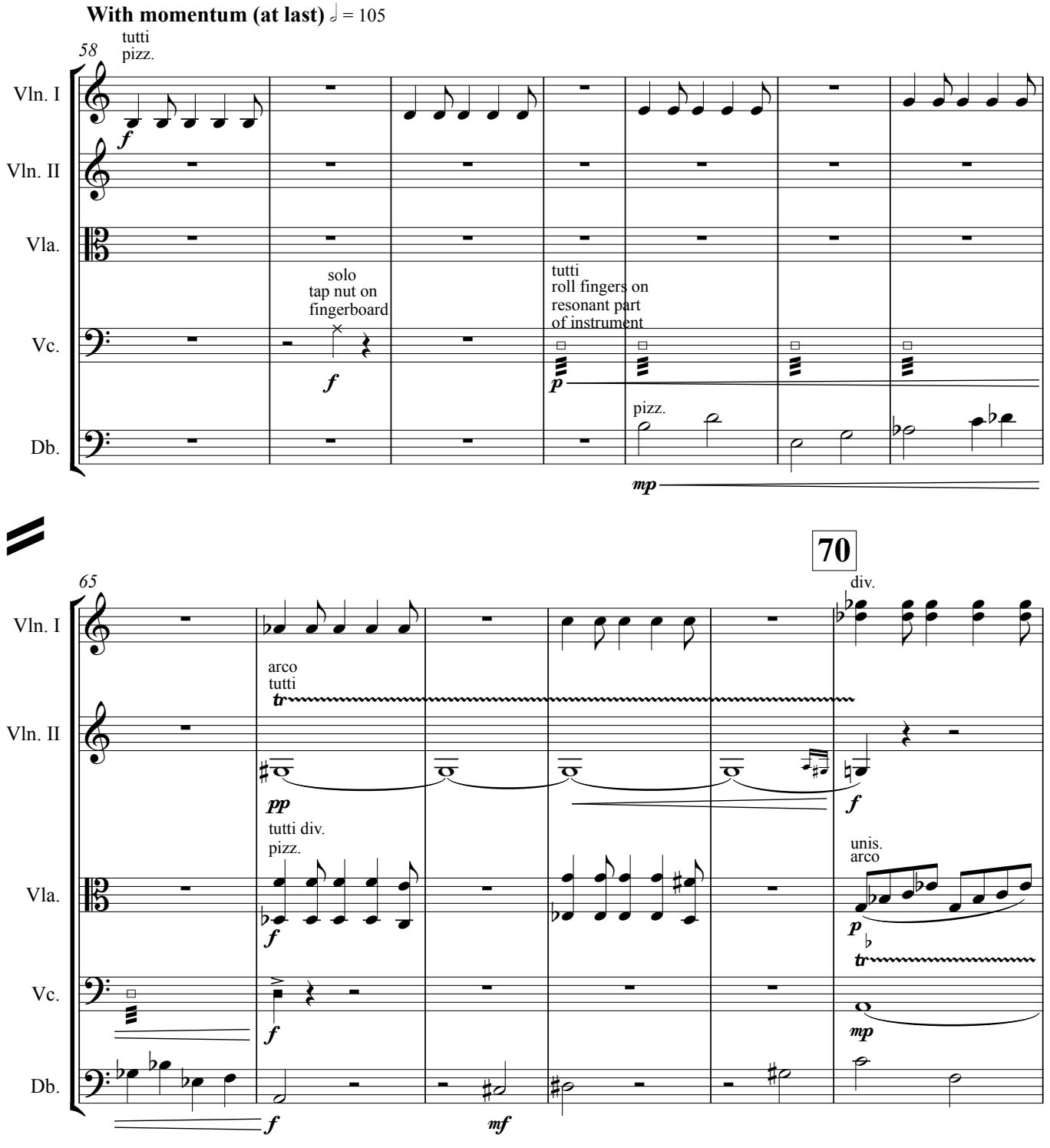
Appendix 2: Tiramisu

Recipe - Step 1

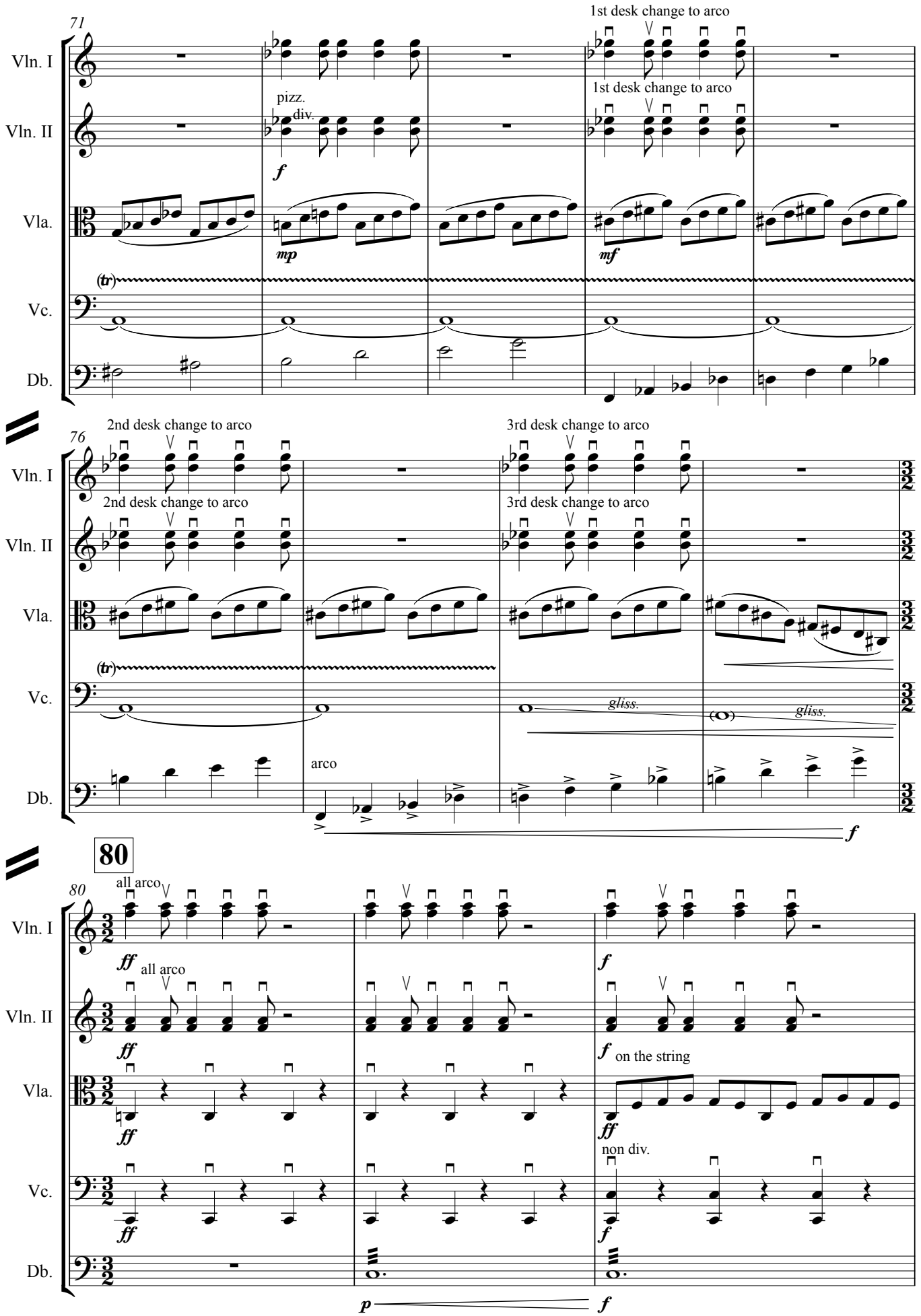
Now we have everything we need.
Are you ready?

We start with the coffee.
We brew it up, we put in a tablespoon of the sugar, and then… the Frangelico.

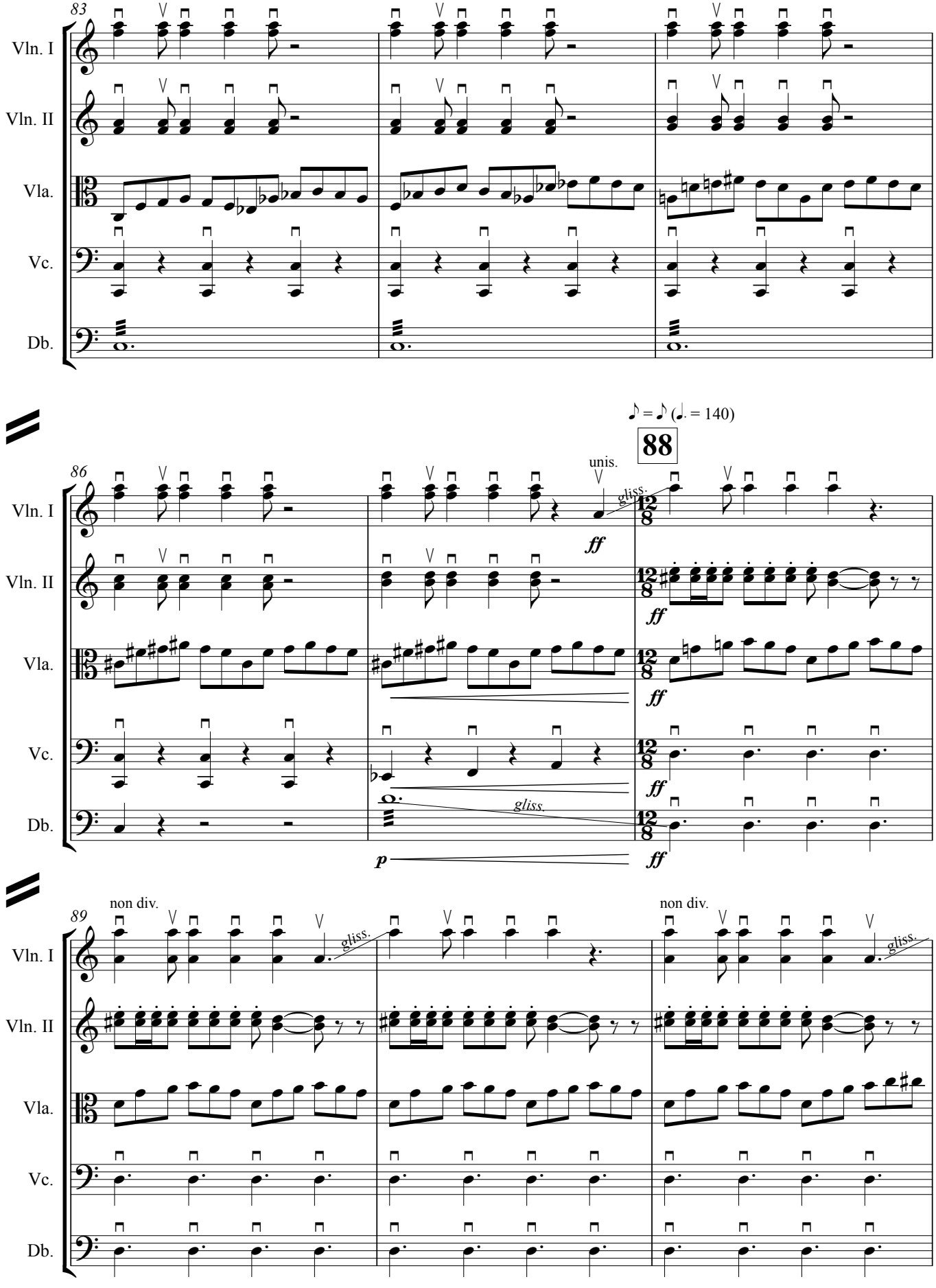
Like this…



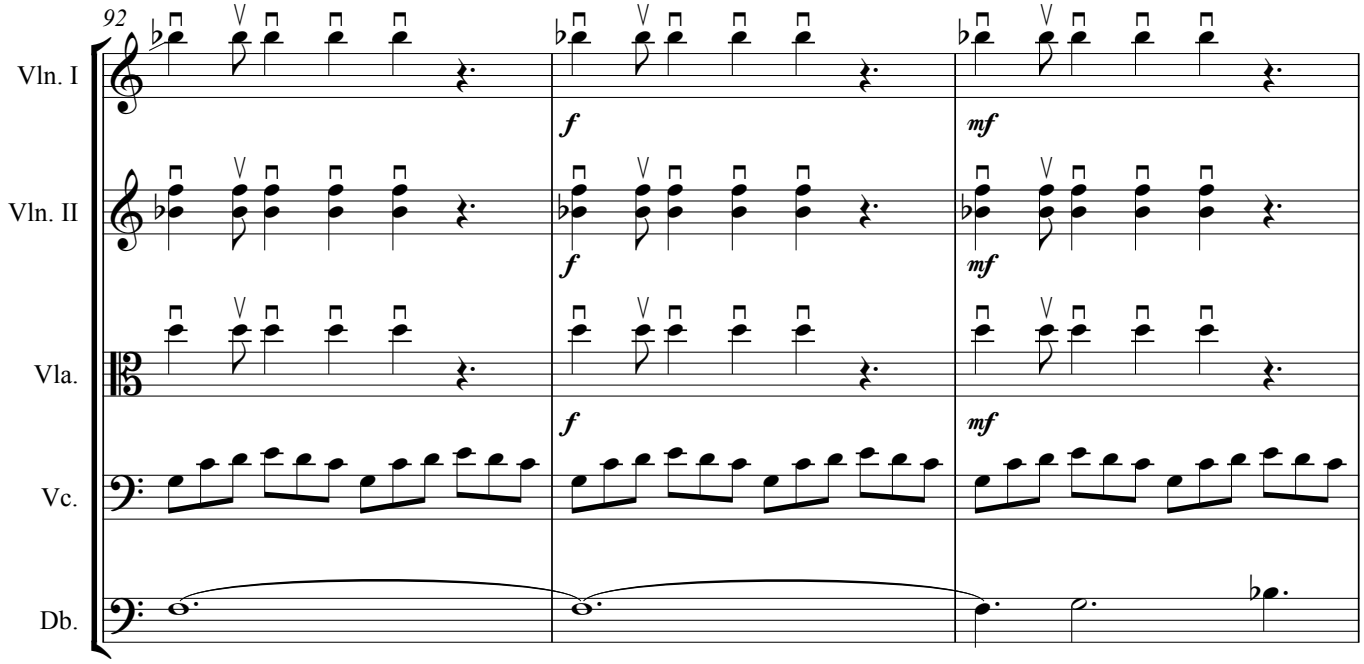
Appendix 2: Tiramisu

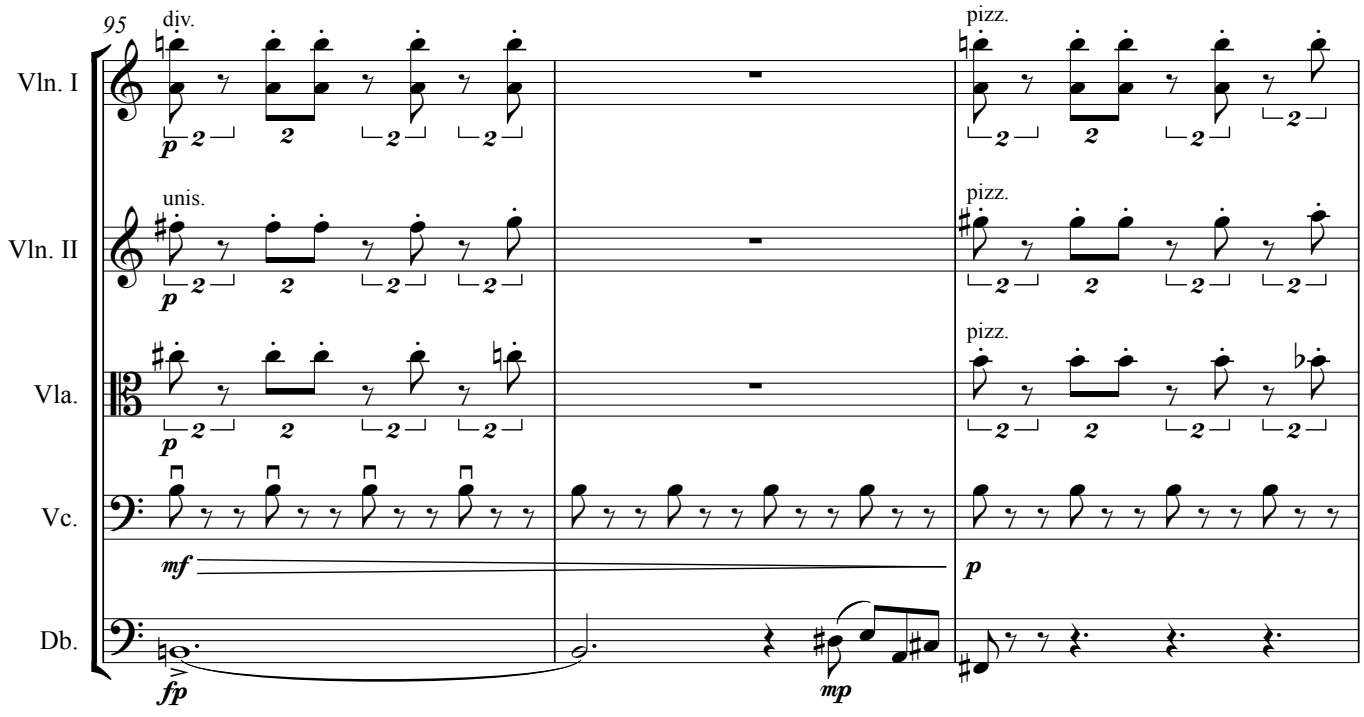


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

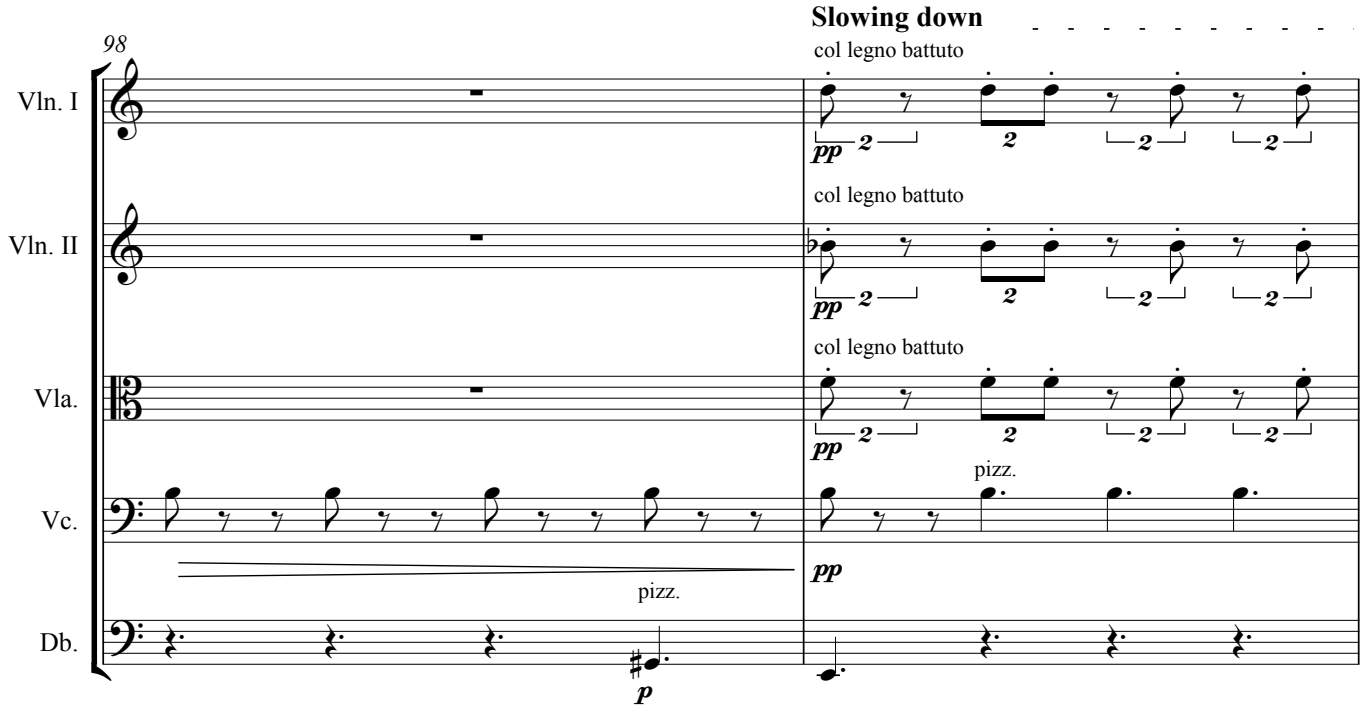


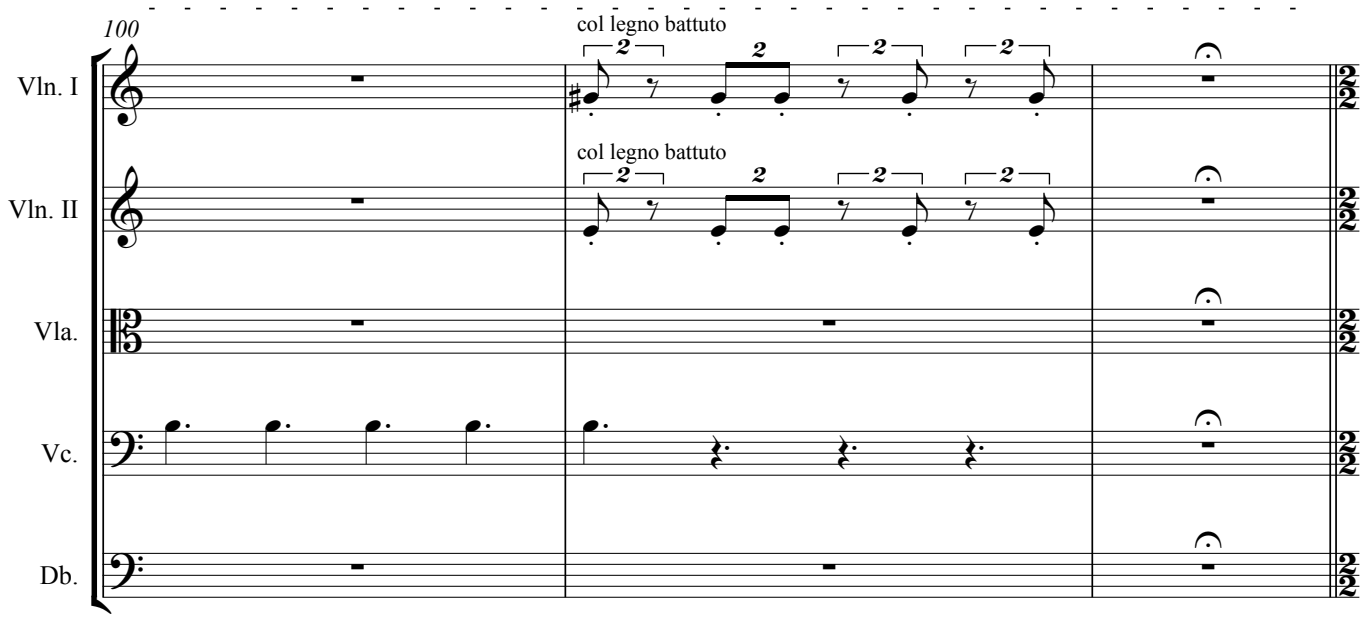
Appendix 2: Tiramisu





Appendix 2: Tiramisu





Appendix 2: Tiramisu

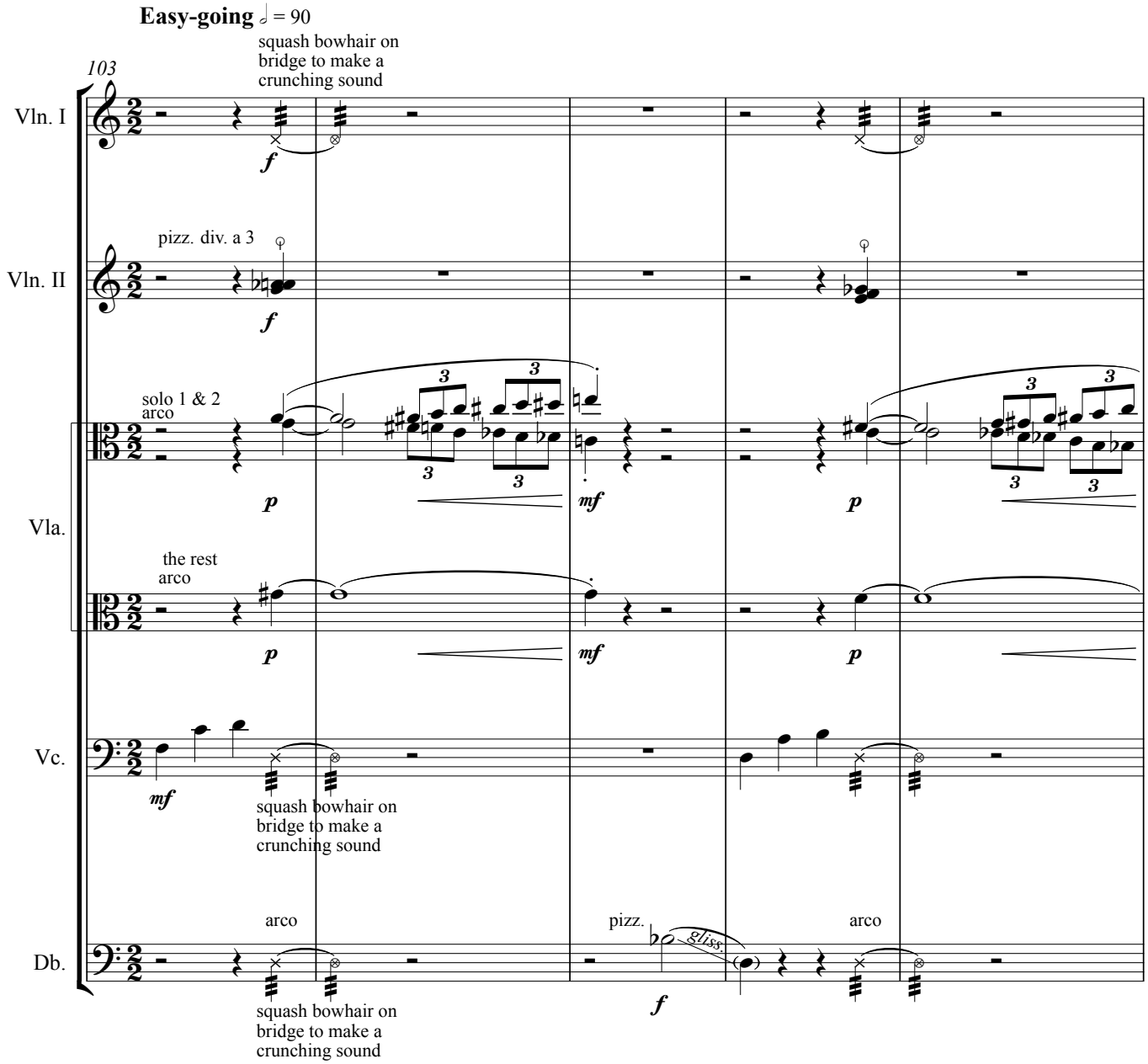
Recipe - Step 2

Mmm, *perfetto*!
And we put the coffee back in the refrigerator;
let it cool down while we prepare the rest.

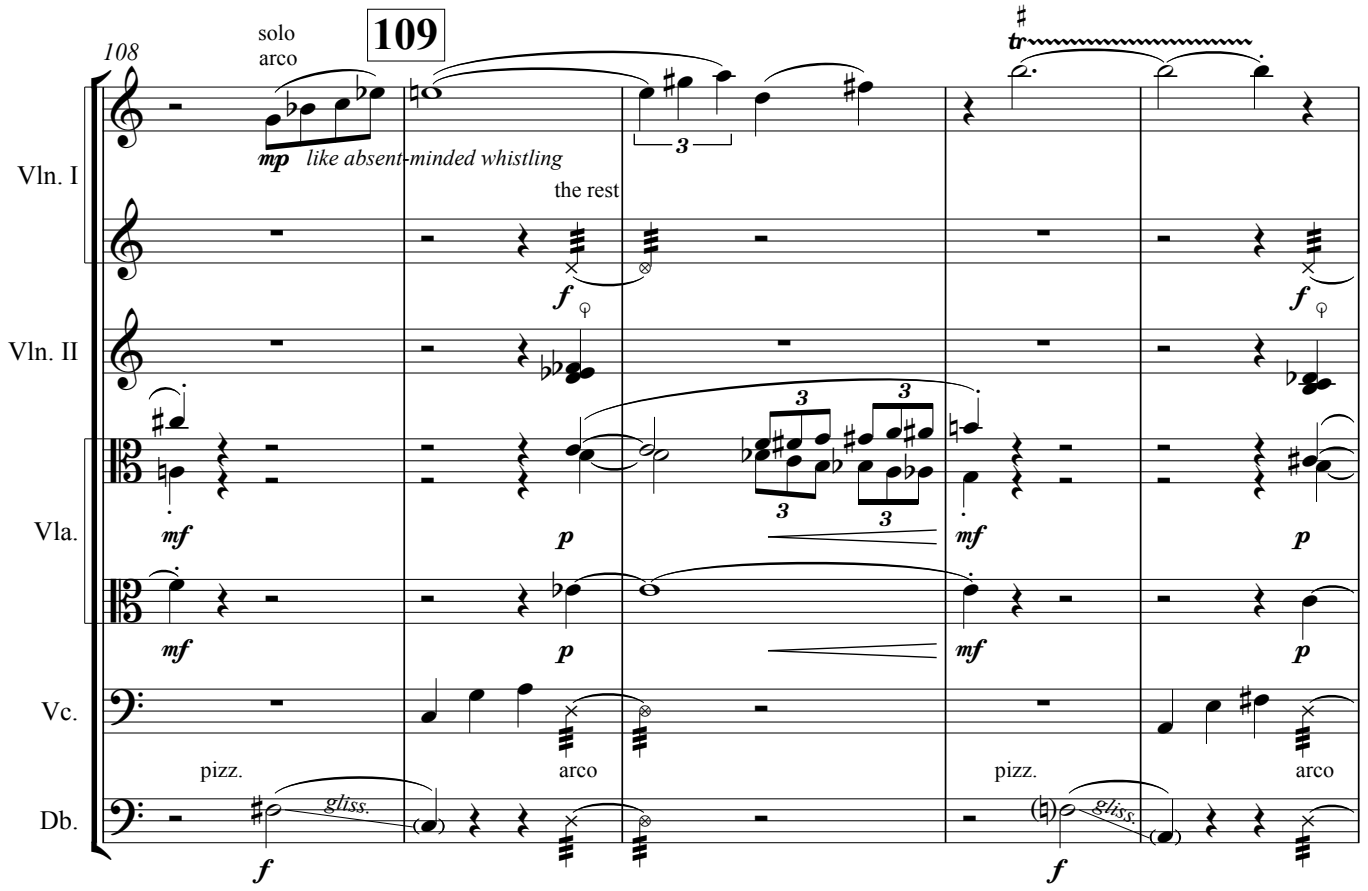
We take now the six eggs, one at a time, and separate them,
so that we have the egg yolks in one bowl… and the egg whites in another…

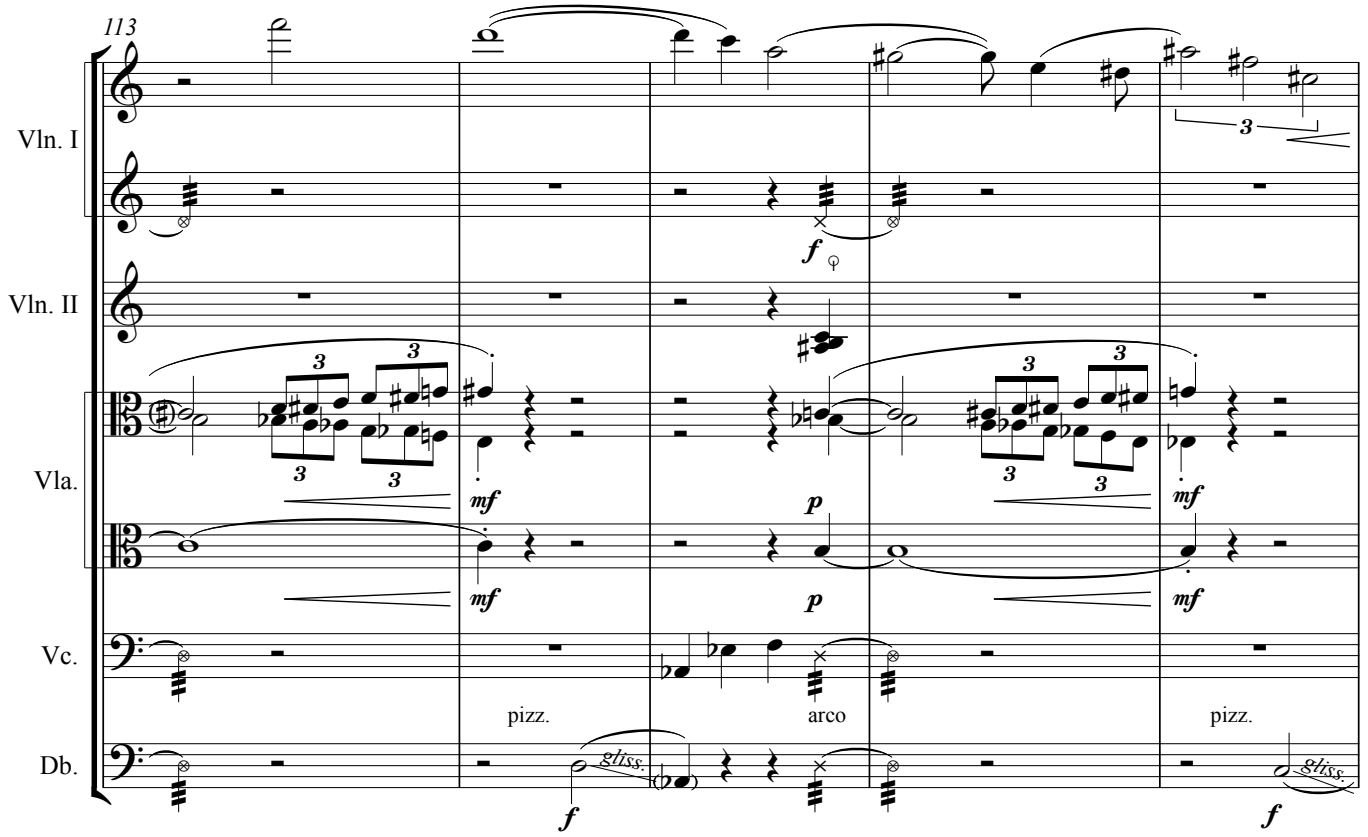
Then we take the yolks and to it add the rest of the sugar,
and whisk it, *prestissimo*, until it's thick and pale.

And to this we add the mascarpone – mmm, my favourite ingredient –
and whisk until it's smooth, like softly whipped cream…

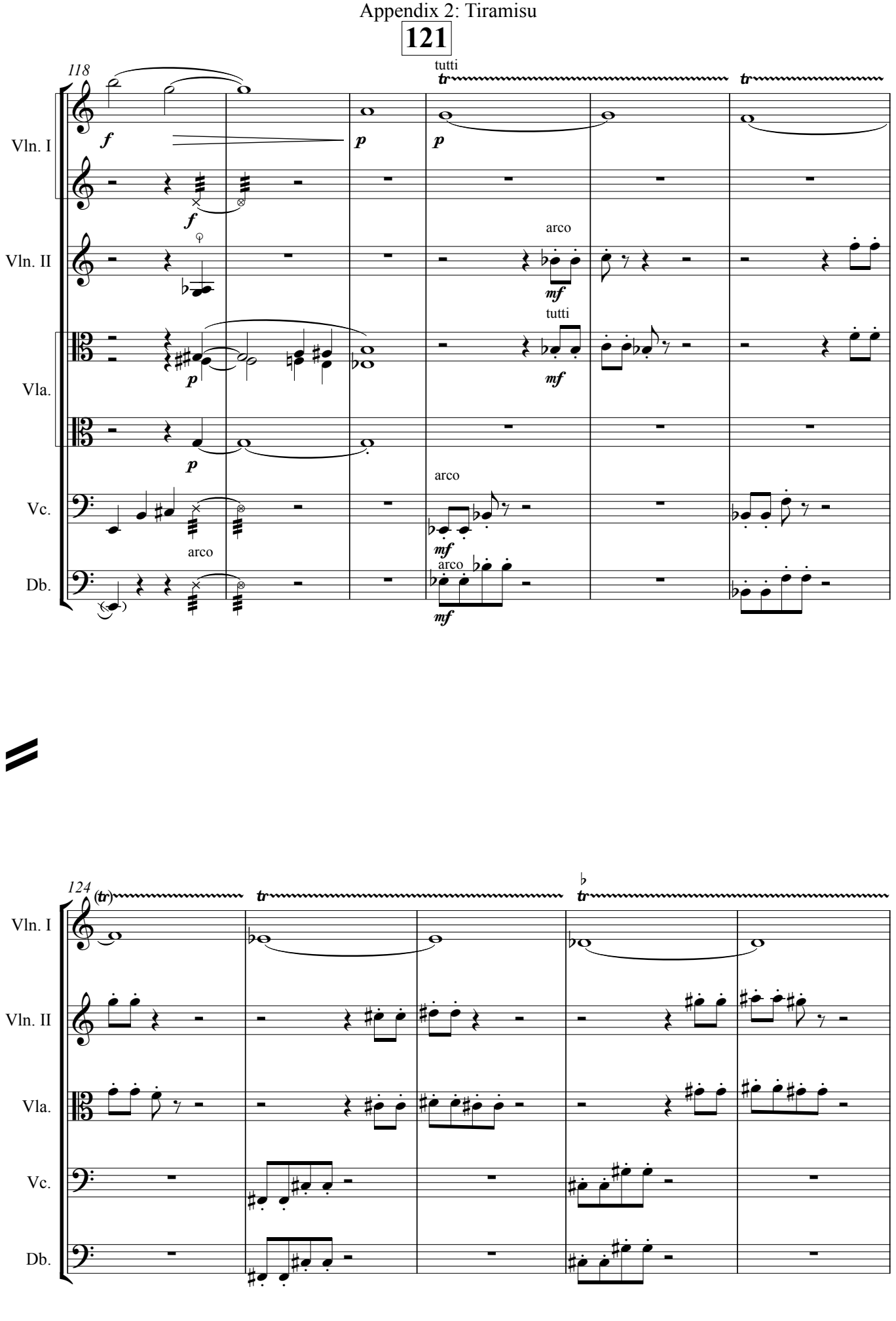


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

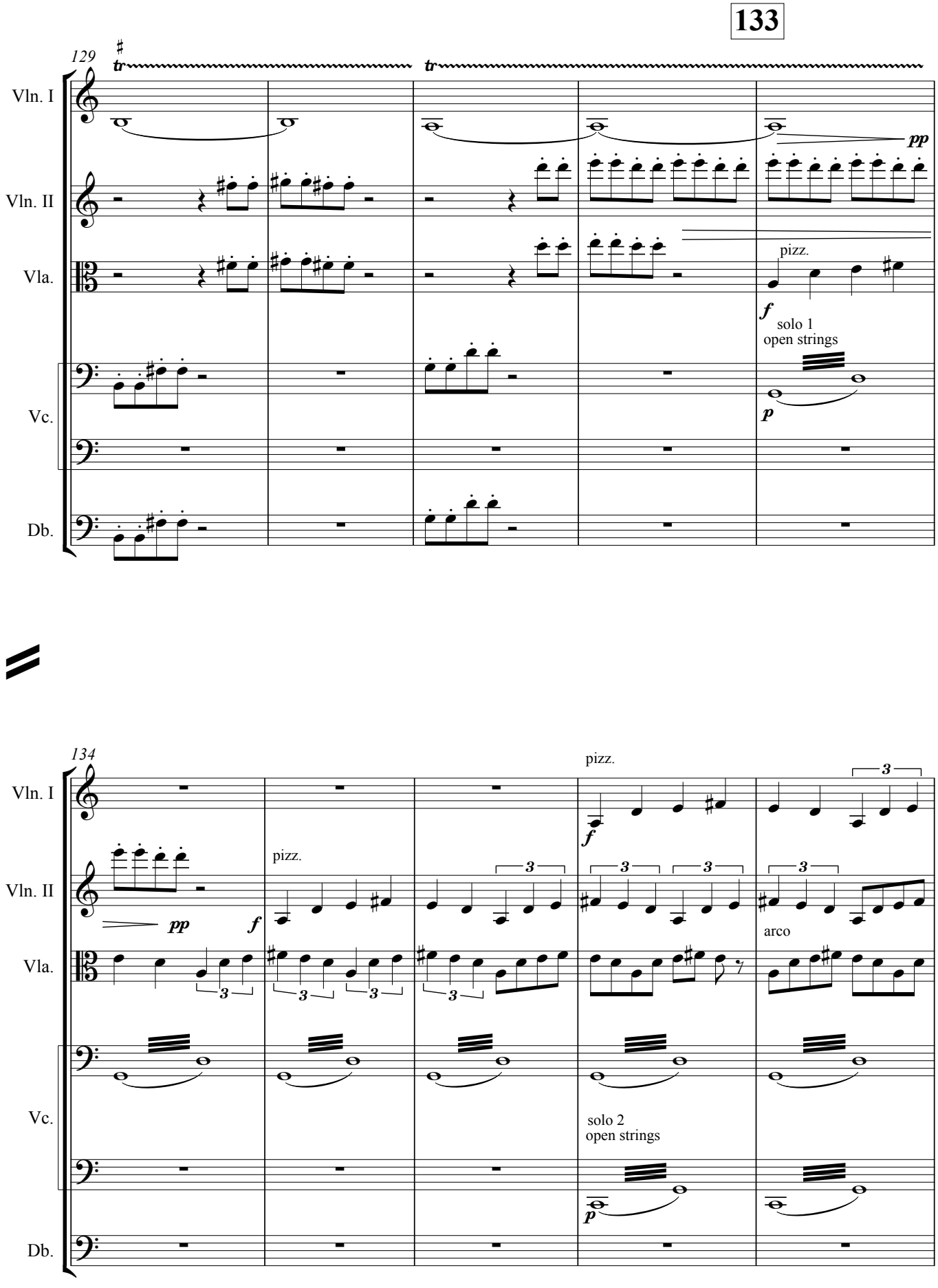




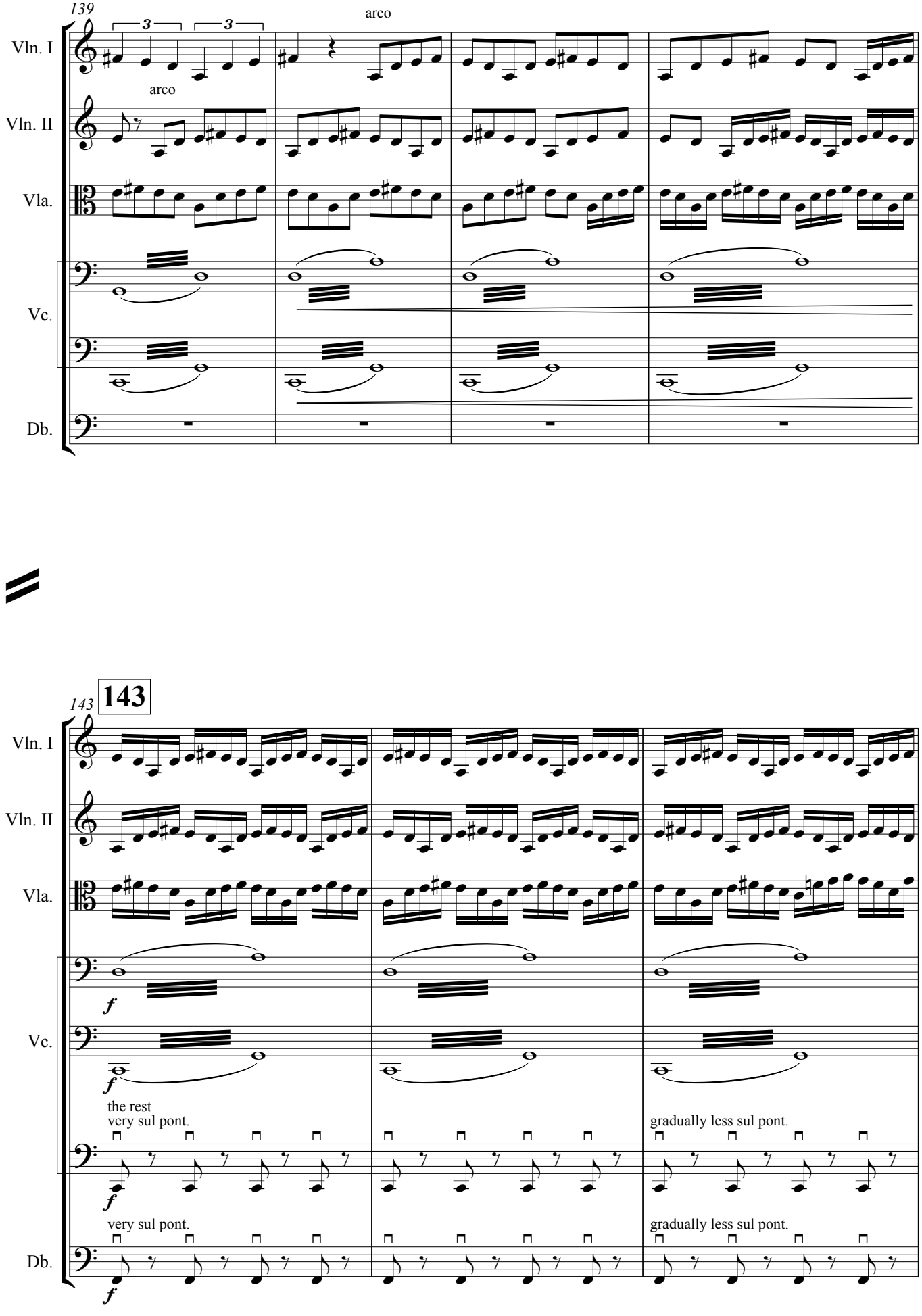
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



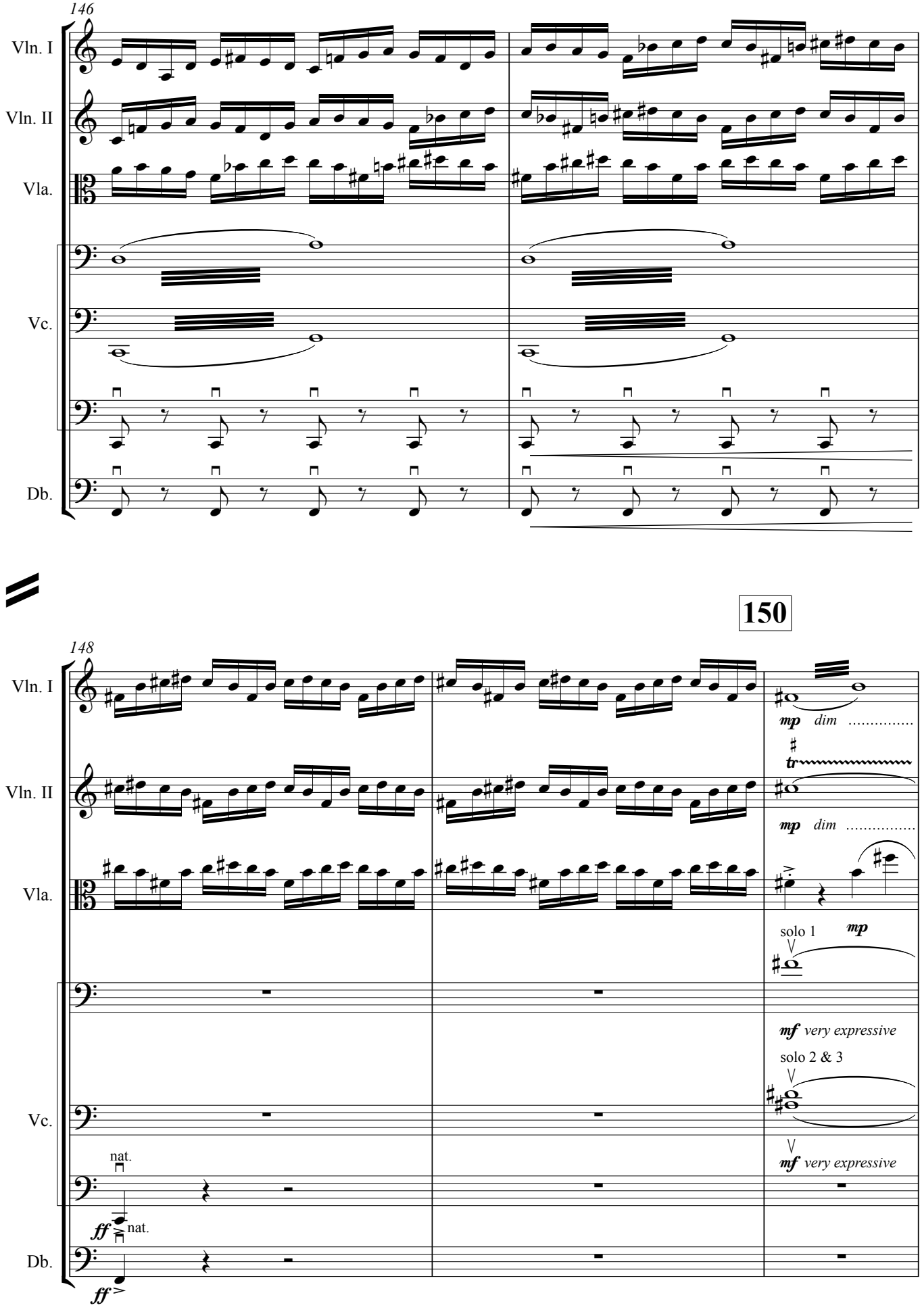
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



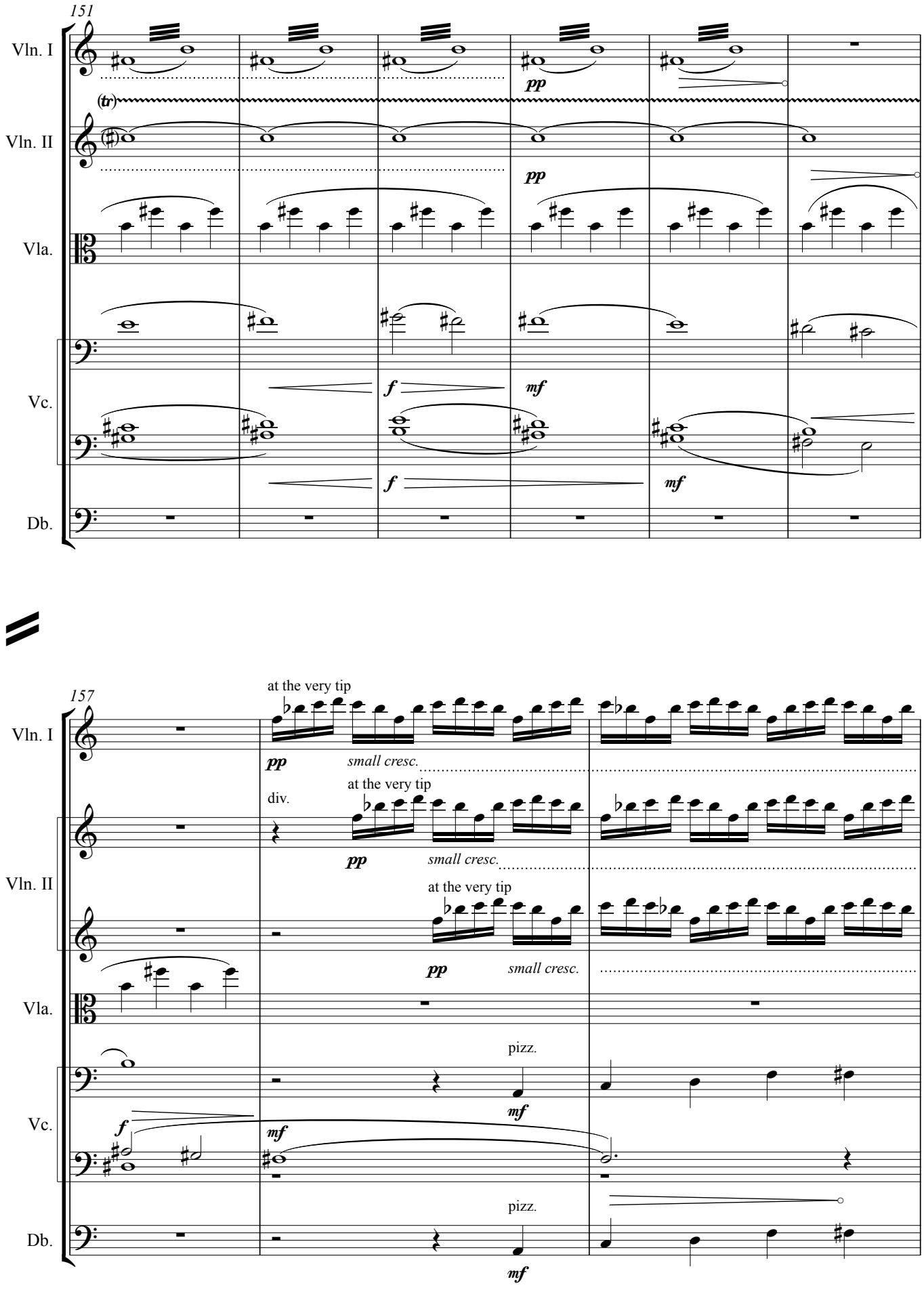
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



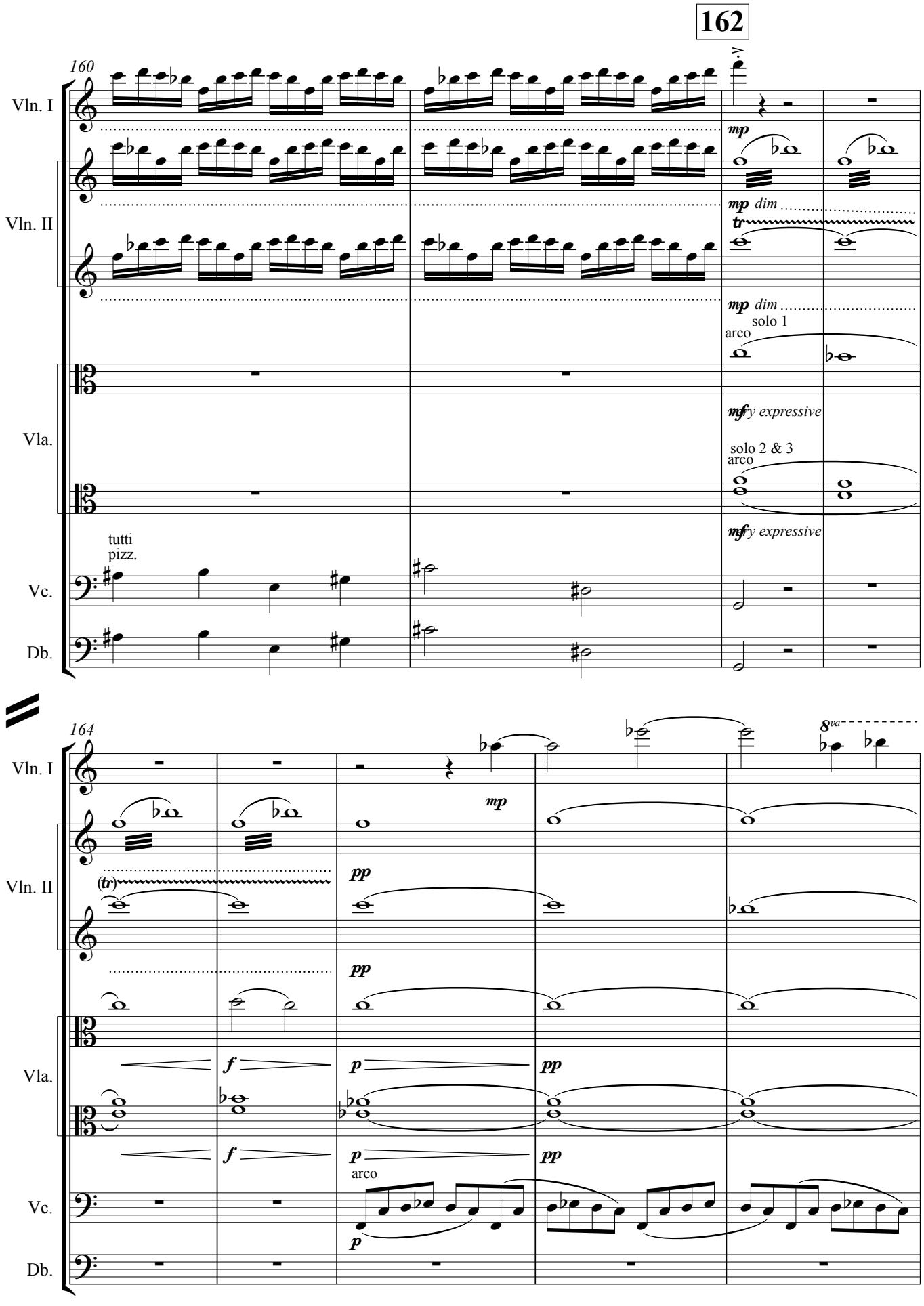
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



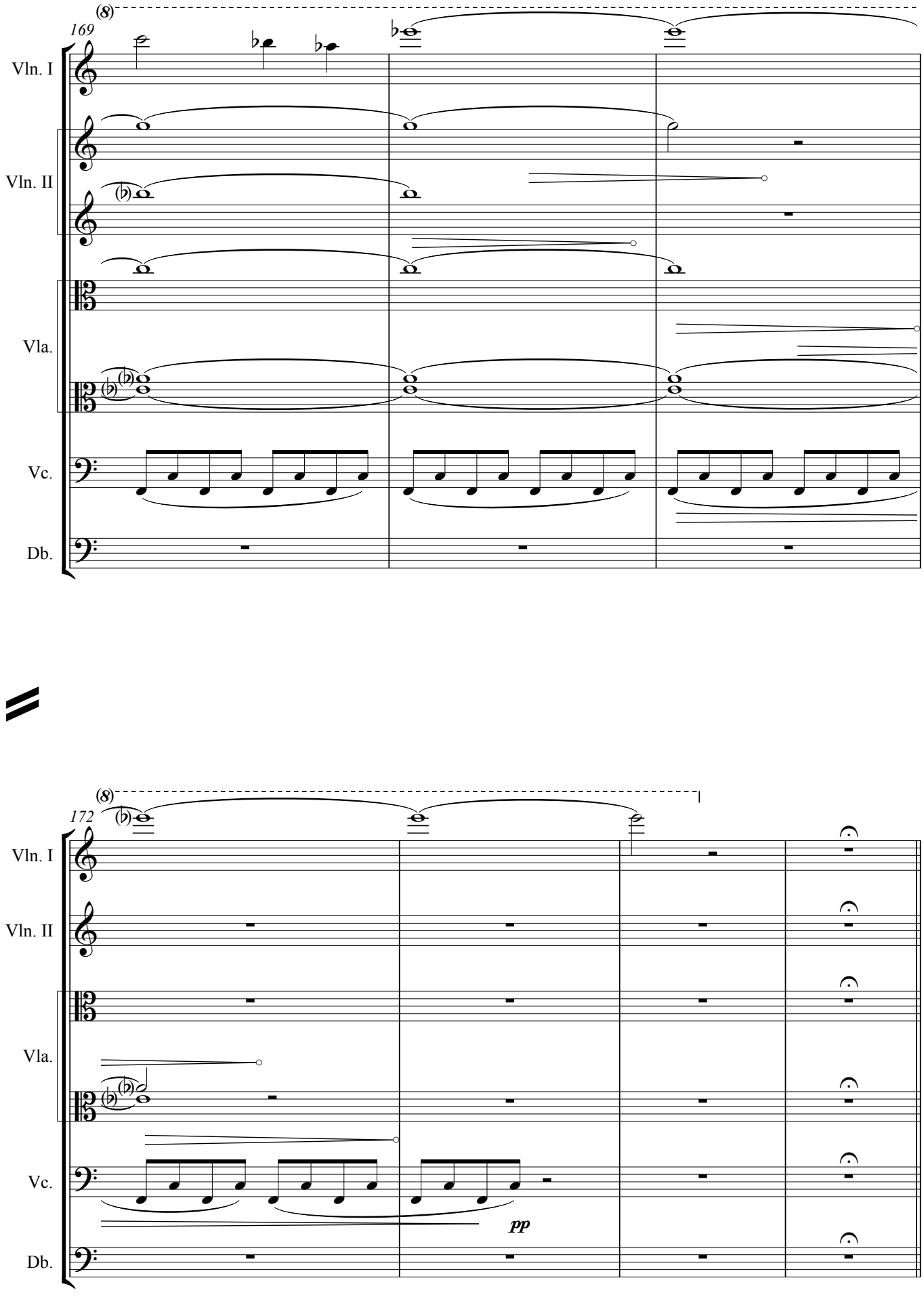
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu

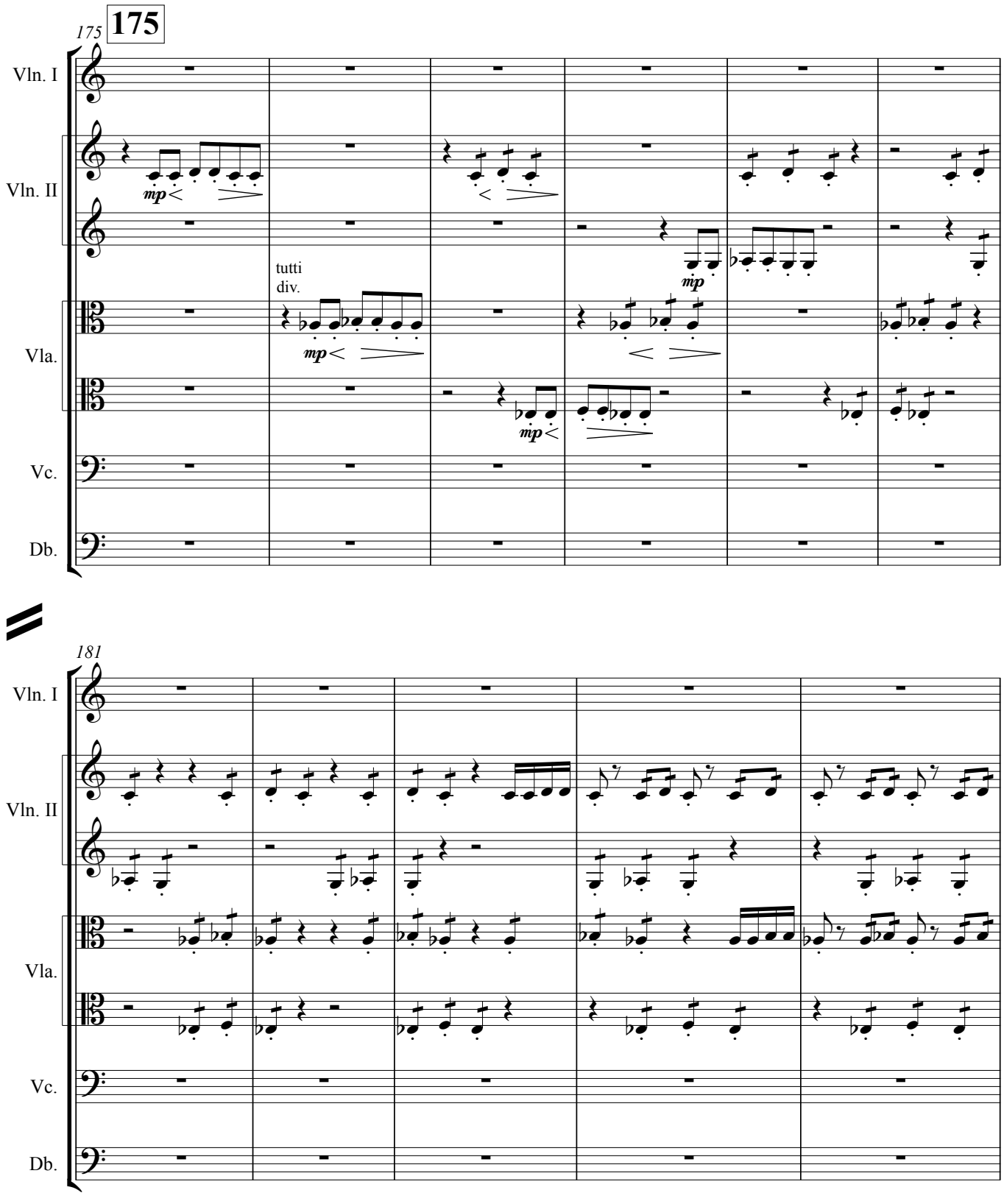


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

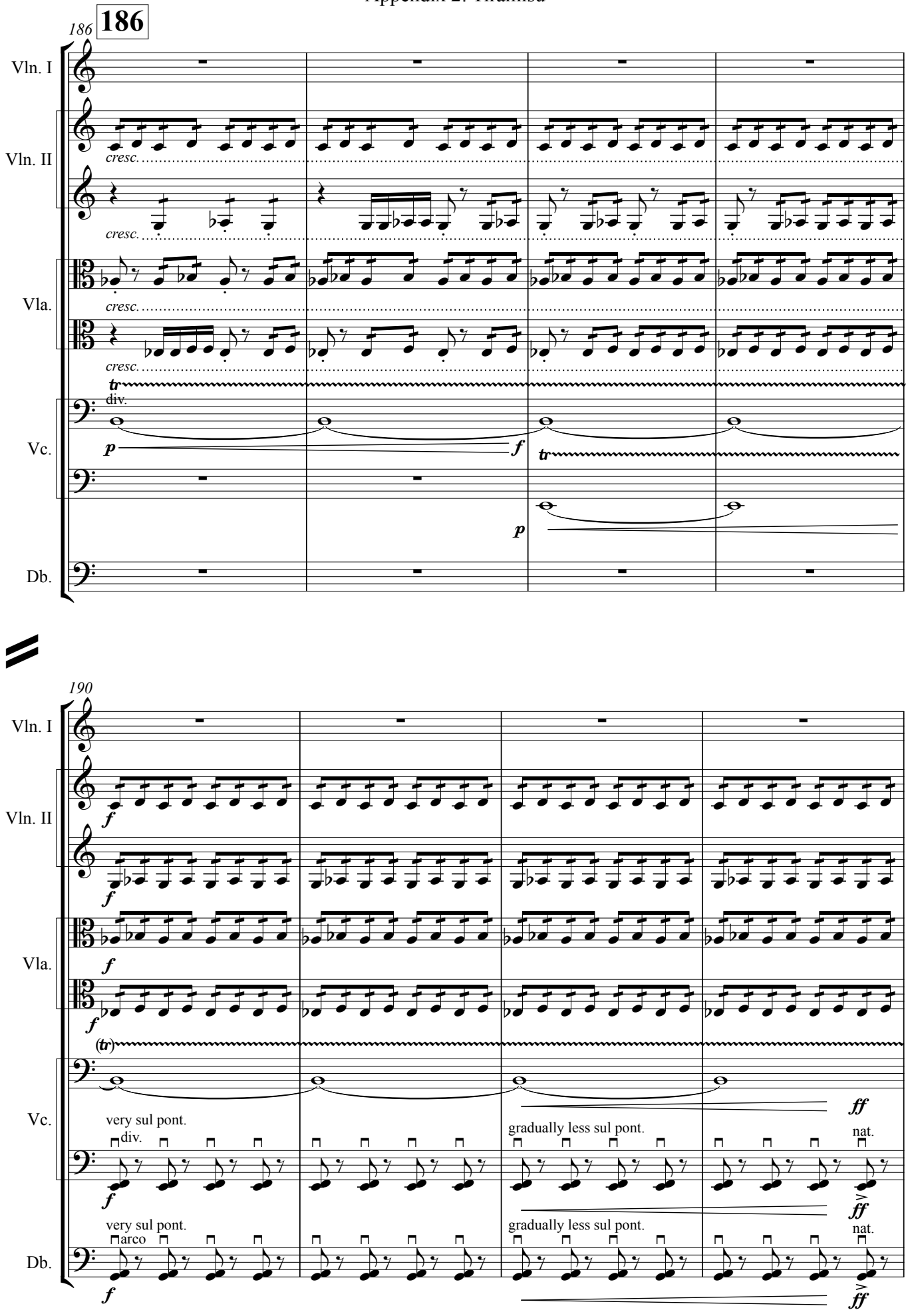
Buonissimo!

Now, we take the egg whites, and whisk those up with the electric beater, until they are stiff and foamy.

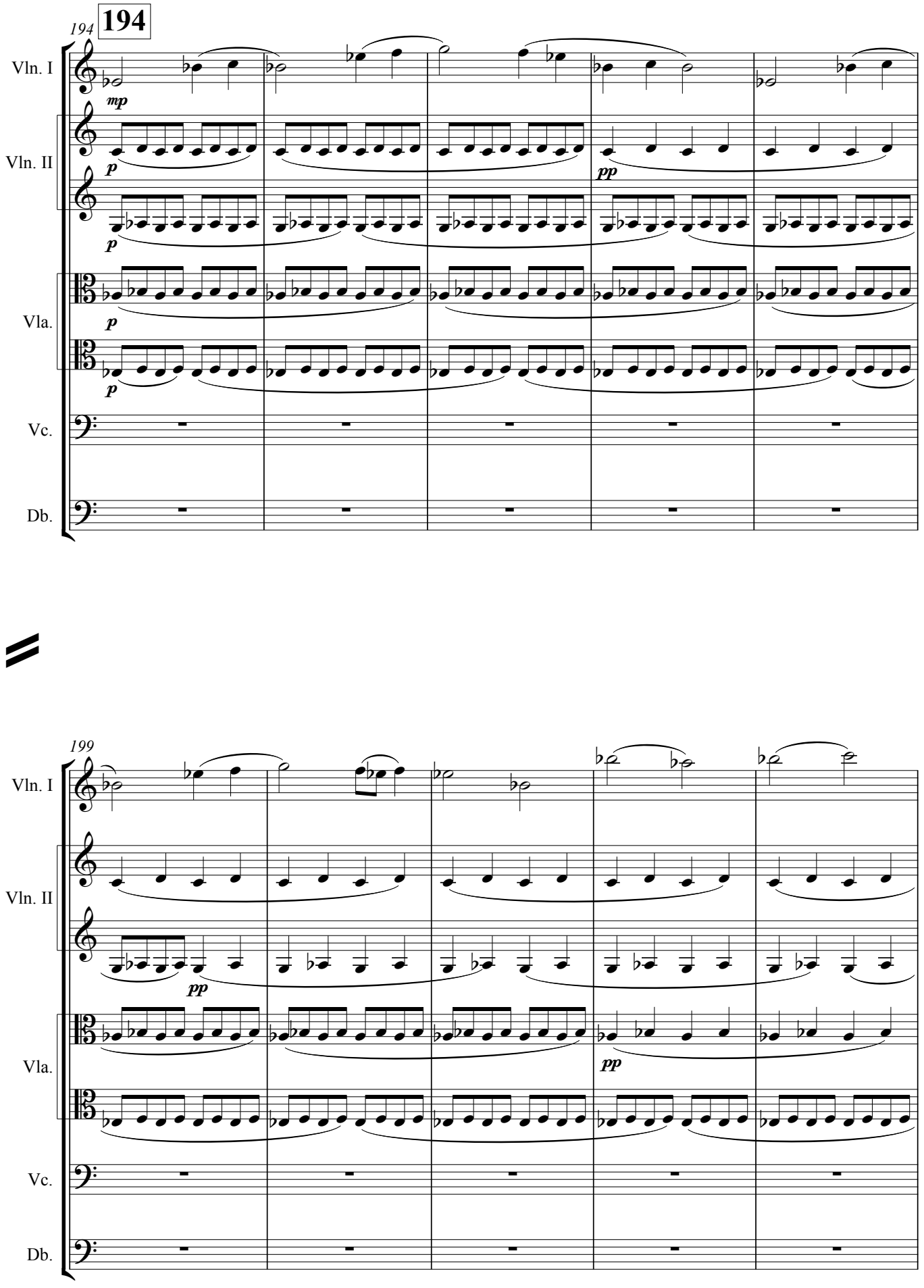
And then we fold it, *poco a poco*, into the mascarpone mixture.



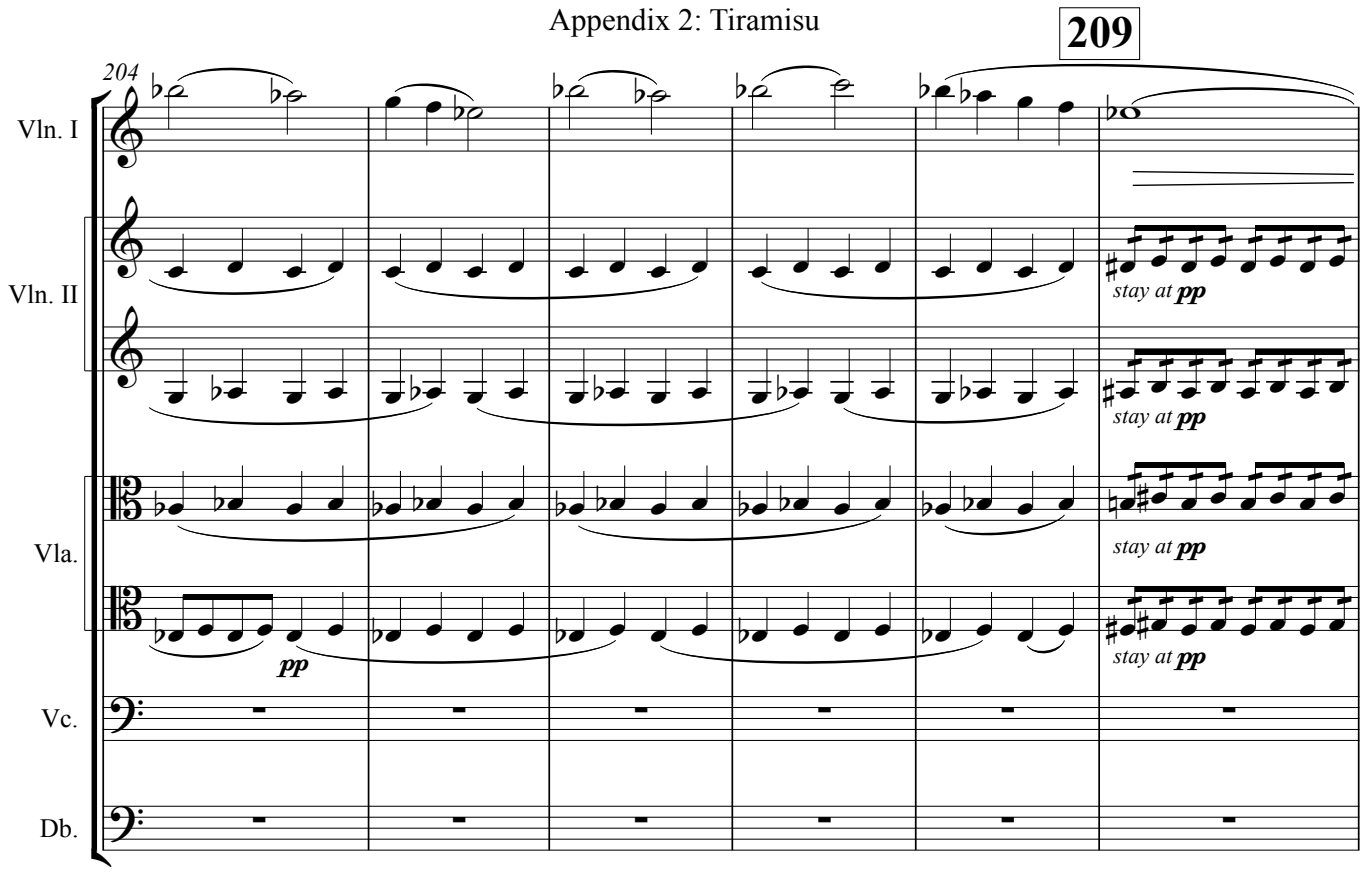
Appendix 2: Tiramisu

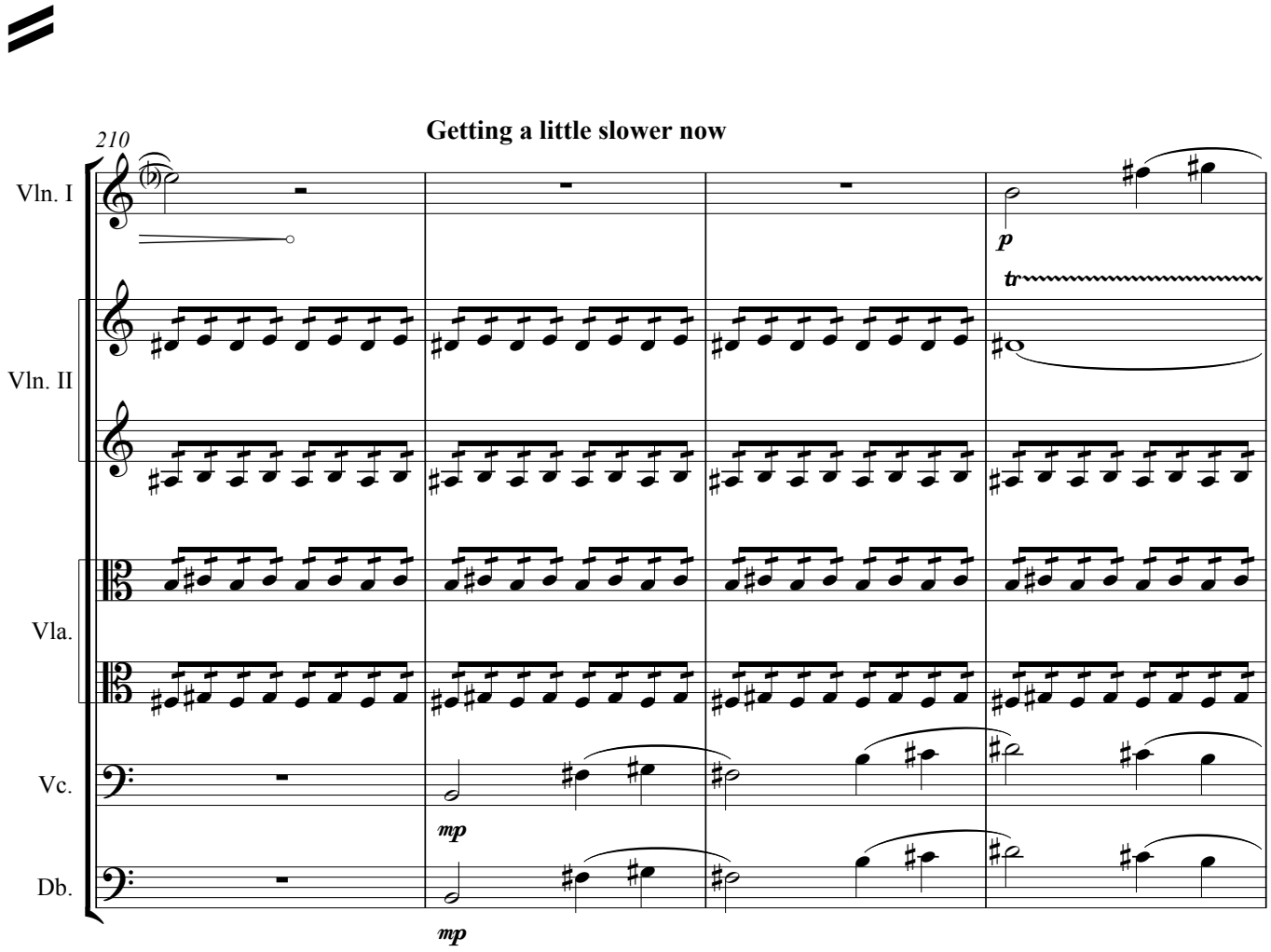


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

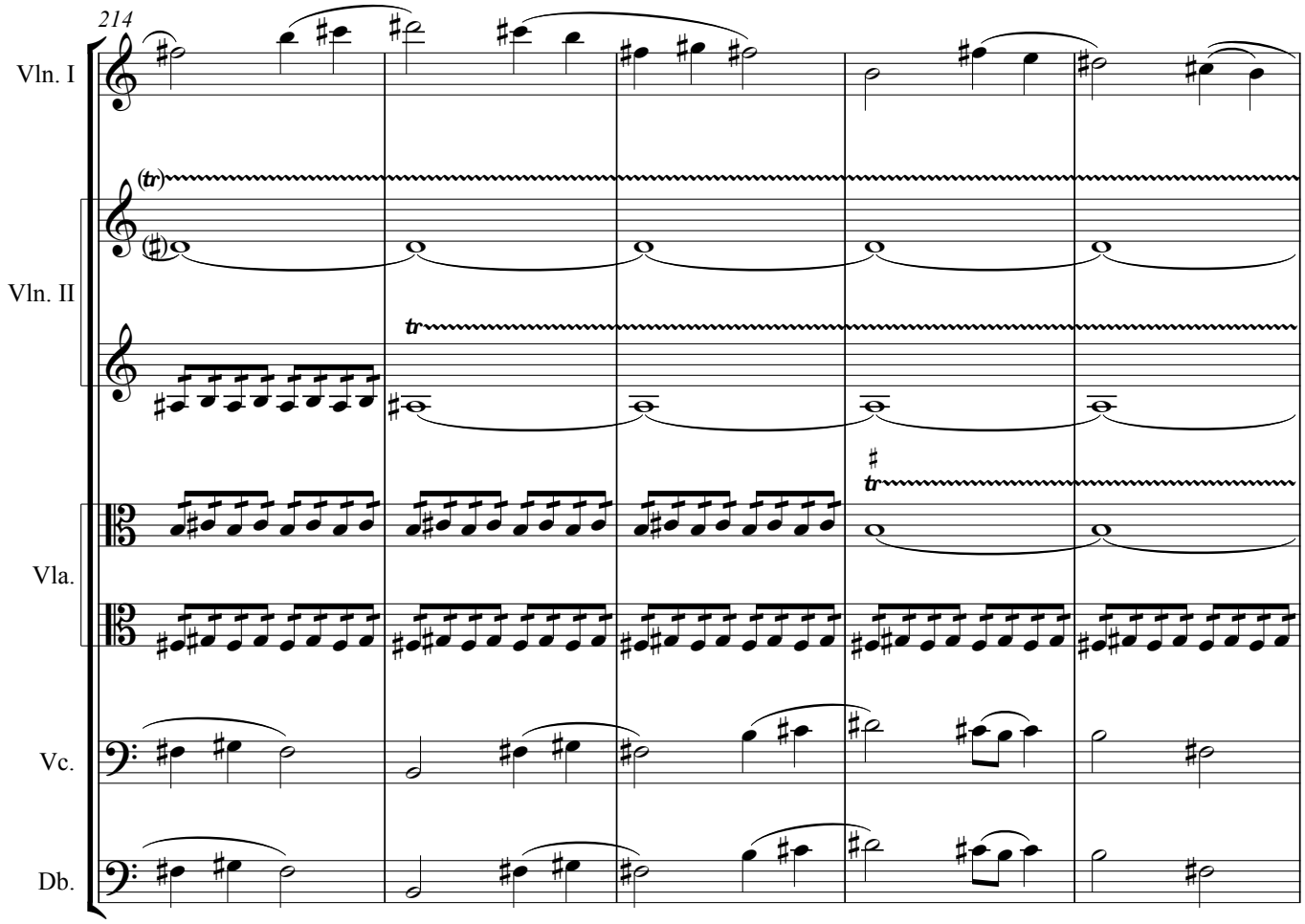


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

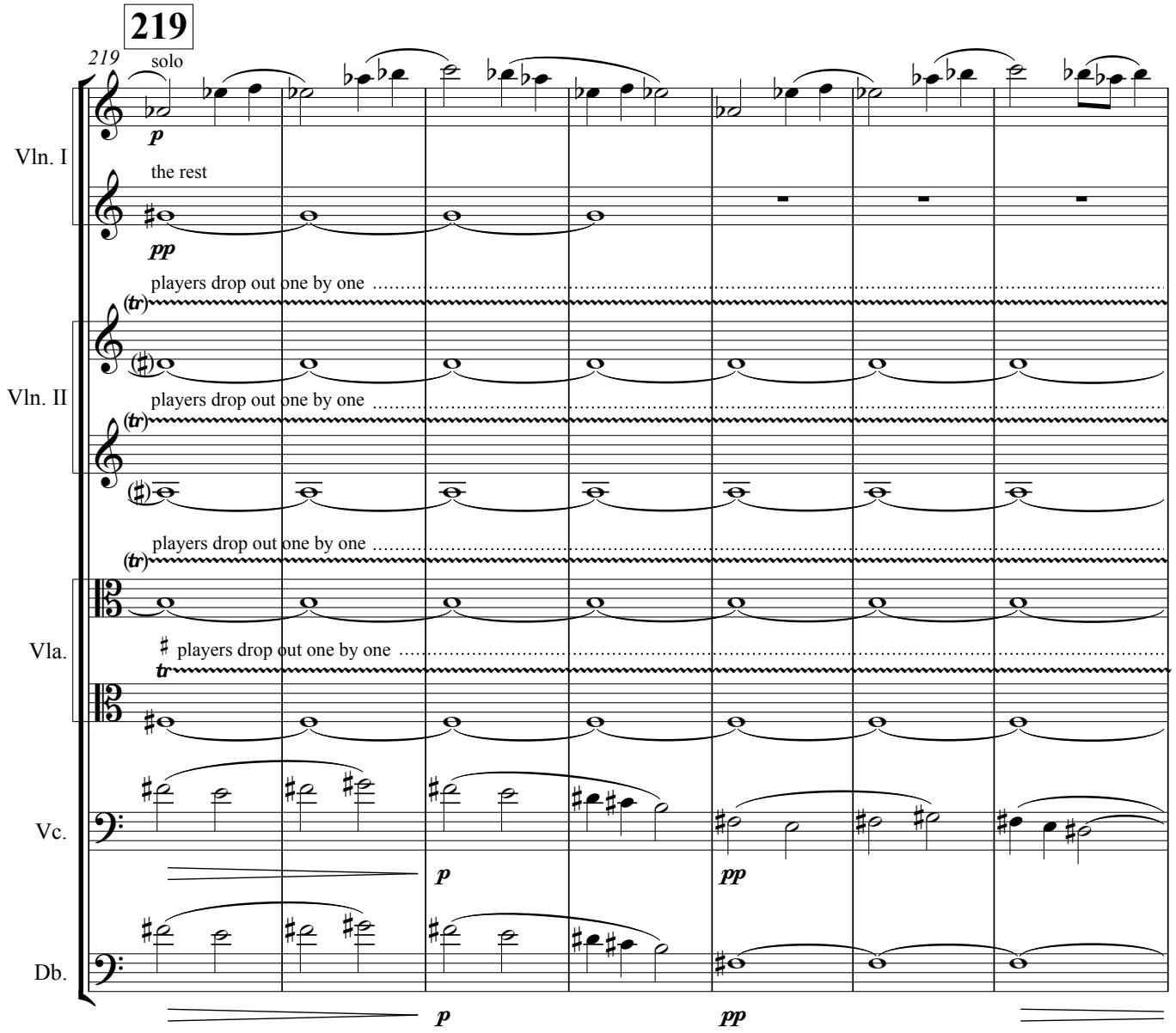




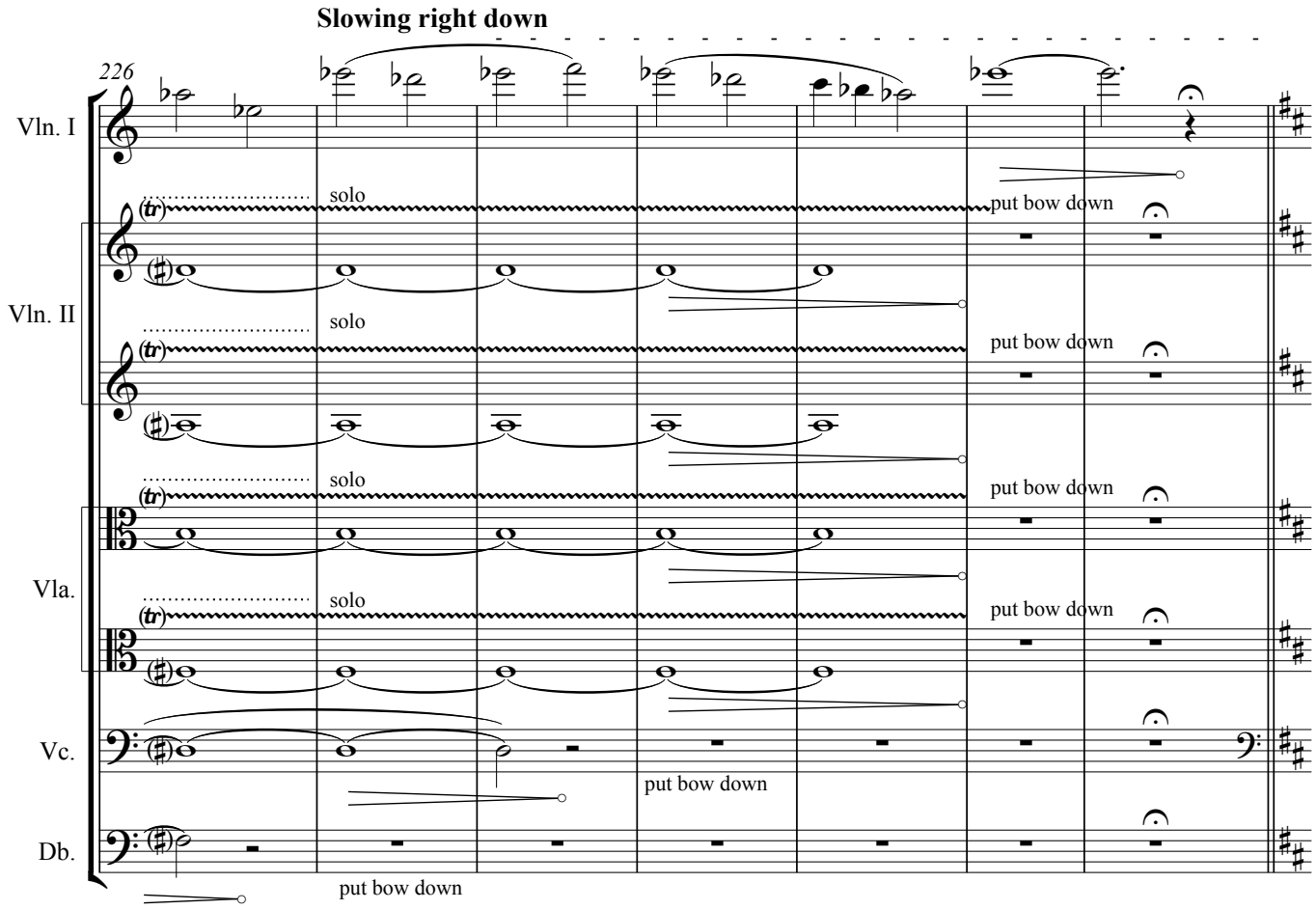
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu

Recipe - Step 3

Mmm… you hear that melody?
It begins to sound like tiramisu!

And now: the fun part, when everything comes together…

We start with the dry savoiardi biscuits.
These we dip briefly into the coffee and frangelico
– just for a few seconds, so they soak up some of that caffeine energy,
and become *vivace con brio*.

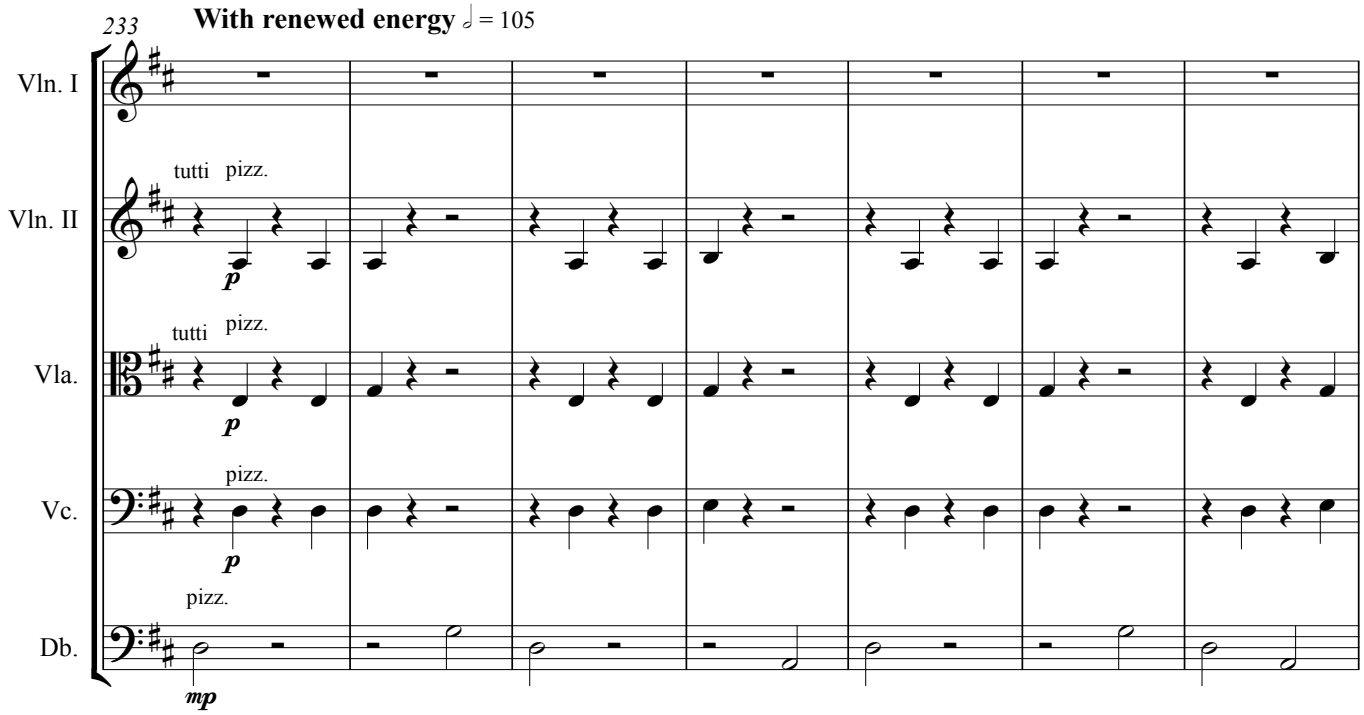
Then we lay them into a dish, and on top we spread the mascarpone mixture, and we make this in two layers.

Finally, on each layer we grate the chocolate.

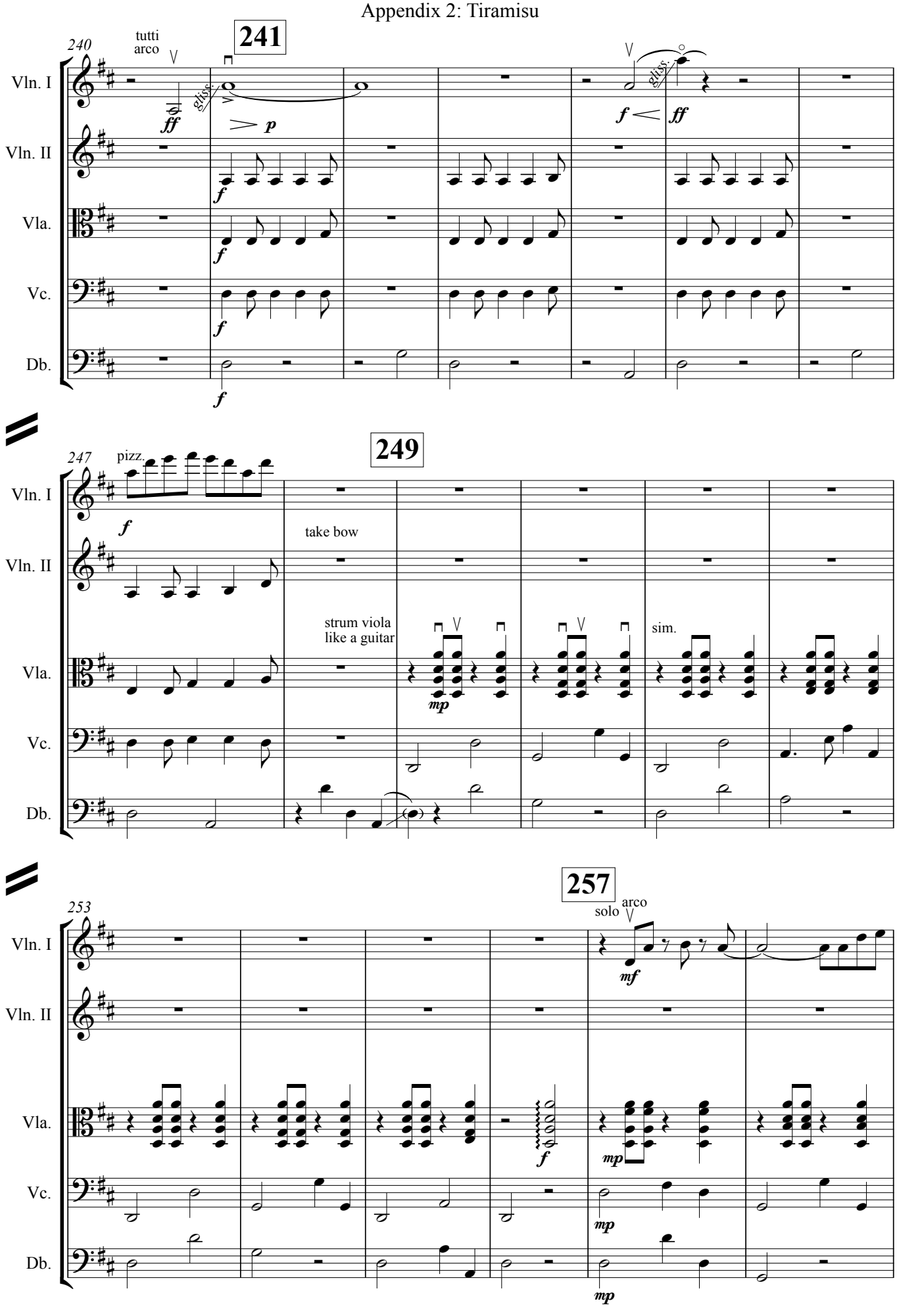
And there you have it… this is your tiramisu…

Usually we are meant to have in the refrigerator for two or three hours…
but… *non importa*!
We will enjoy it now, together…

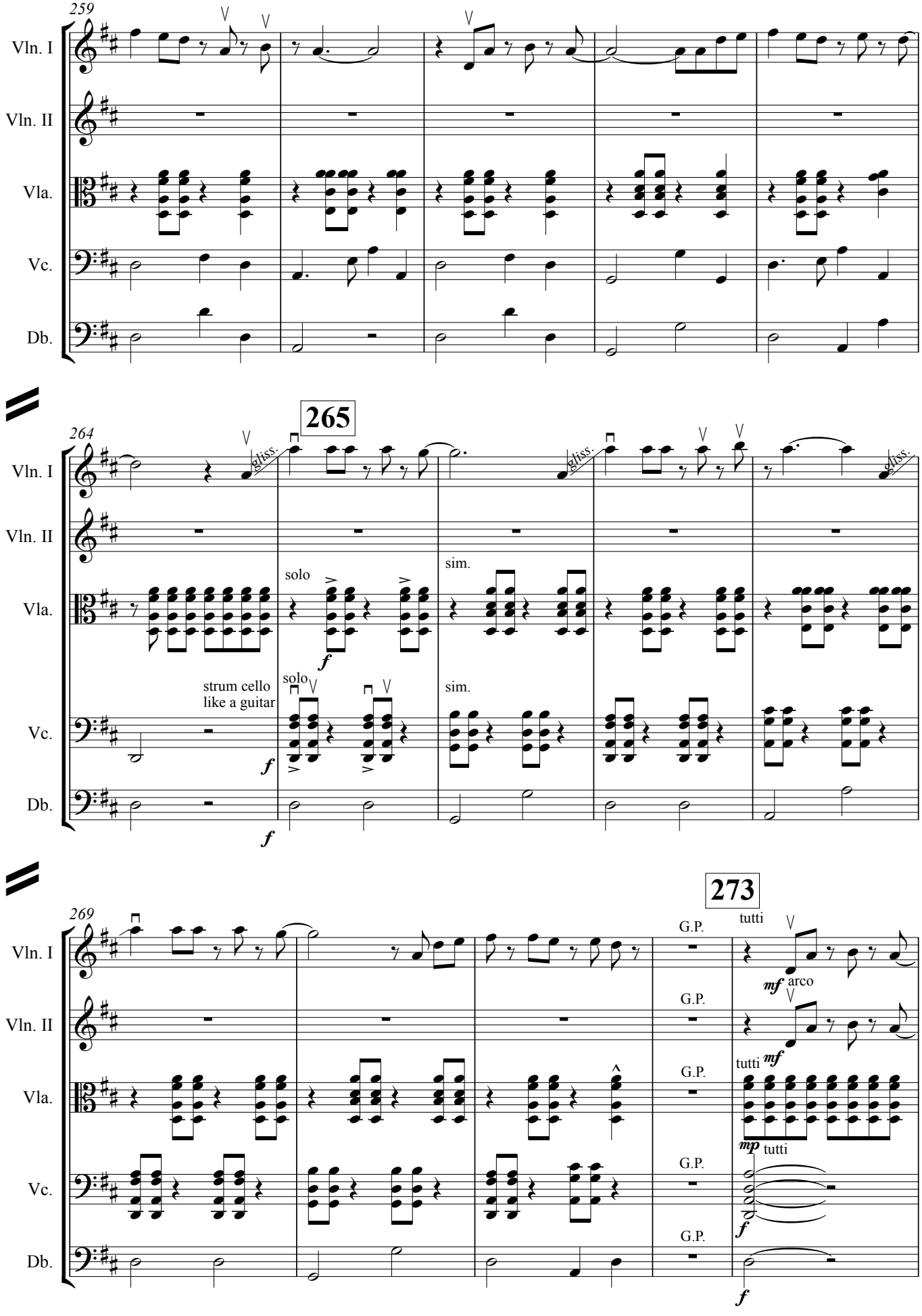
Buon appetito!



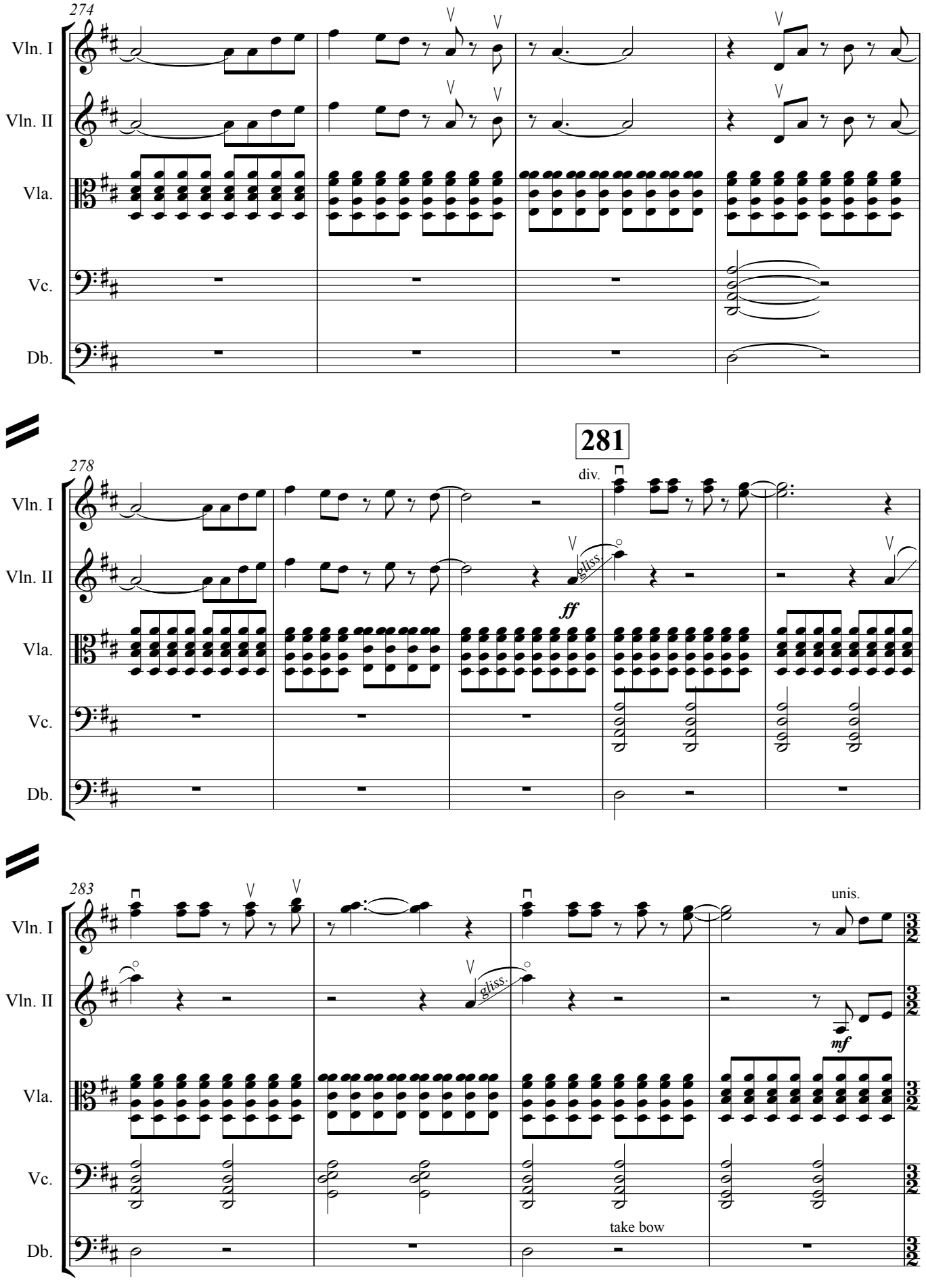
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



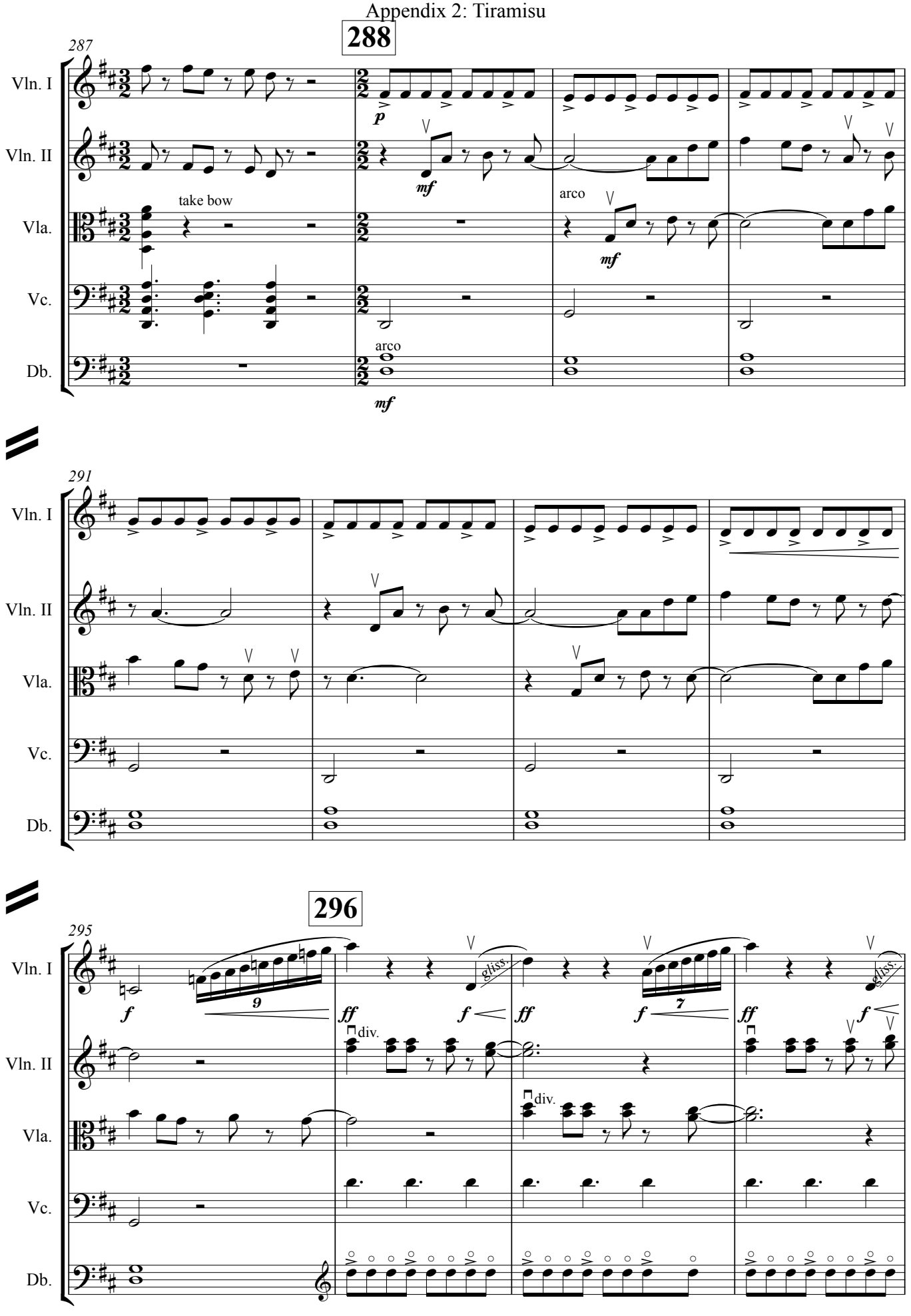
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



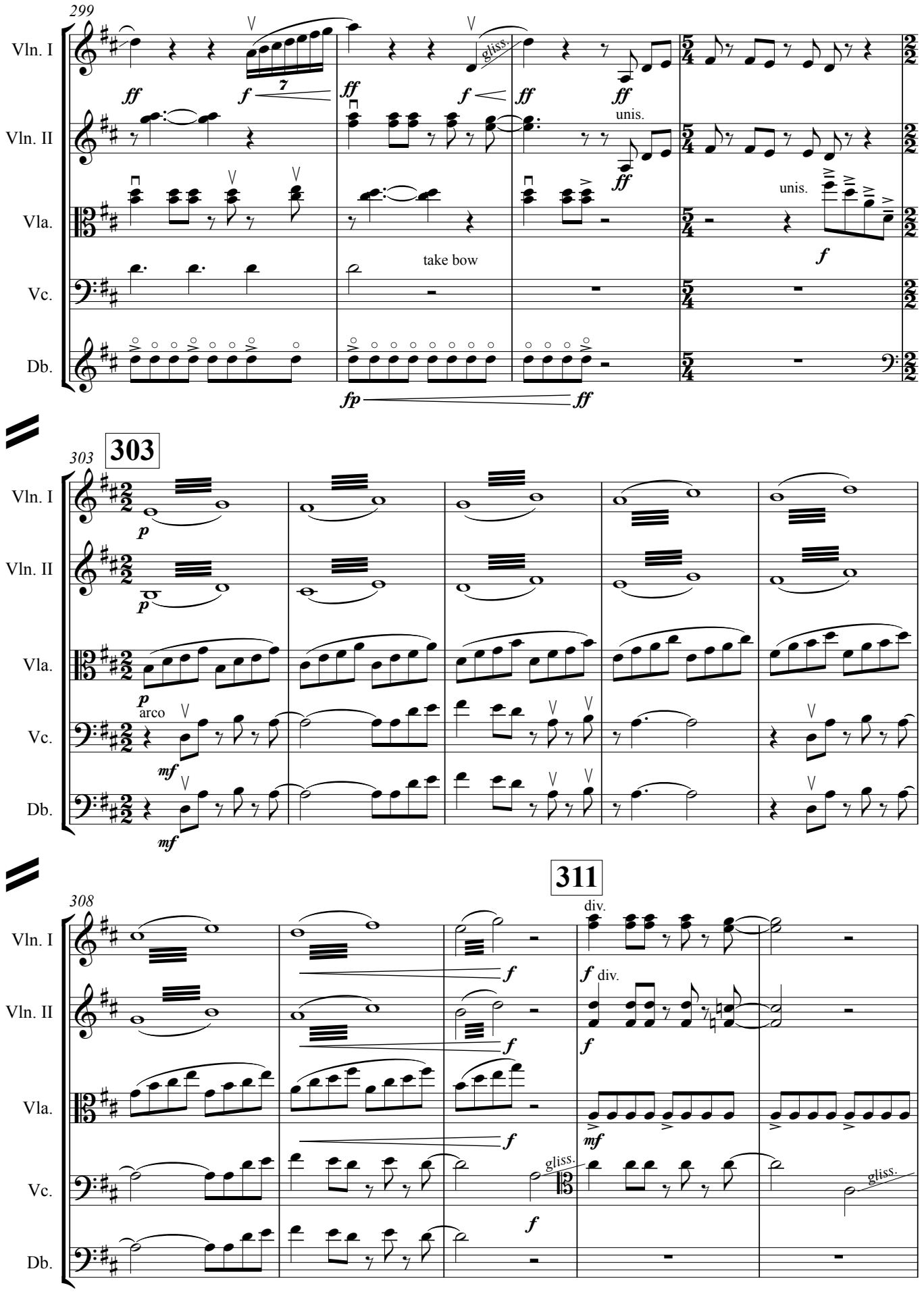
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



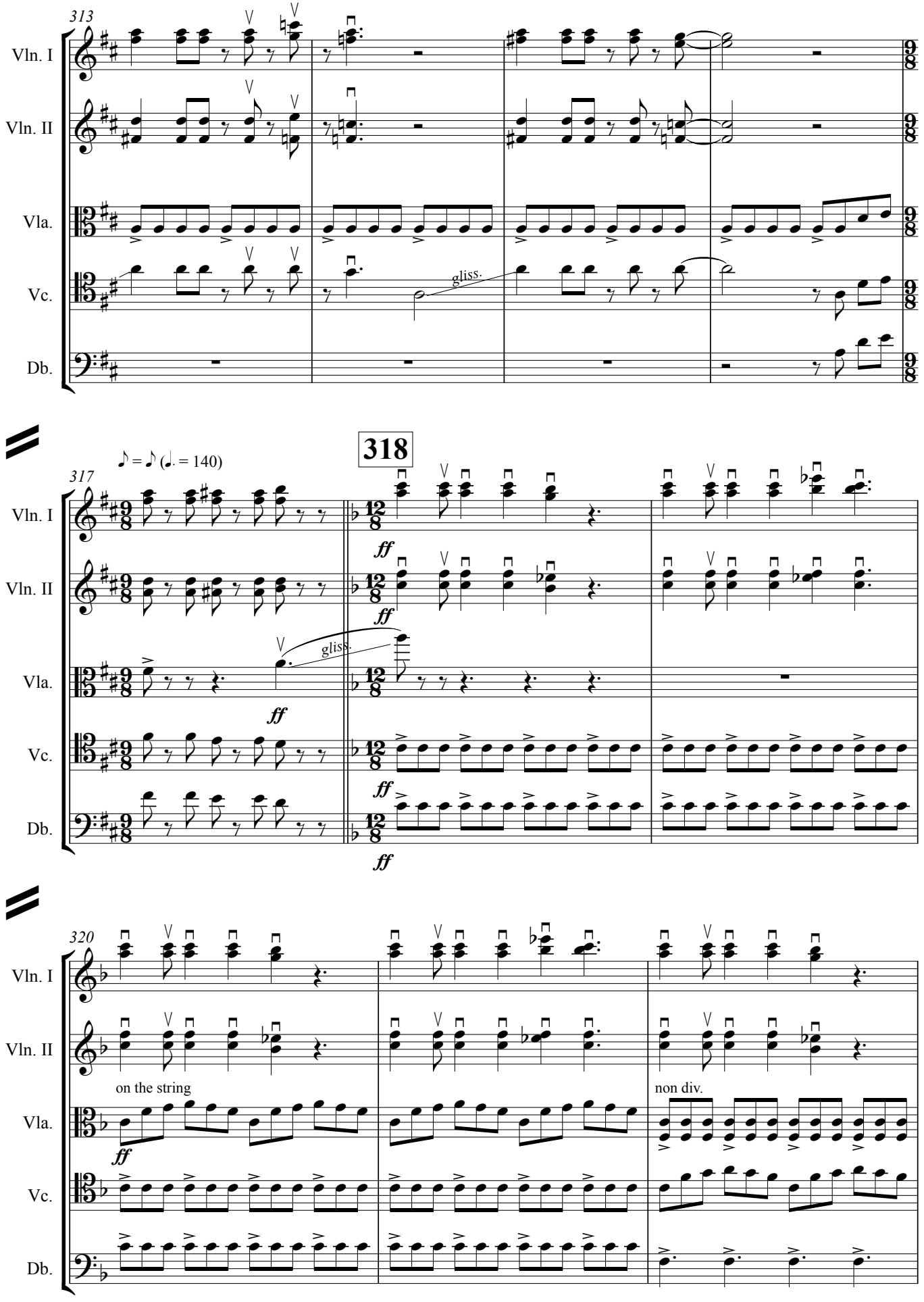
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



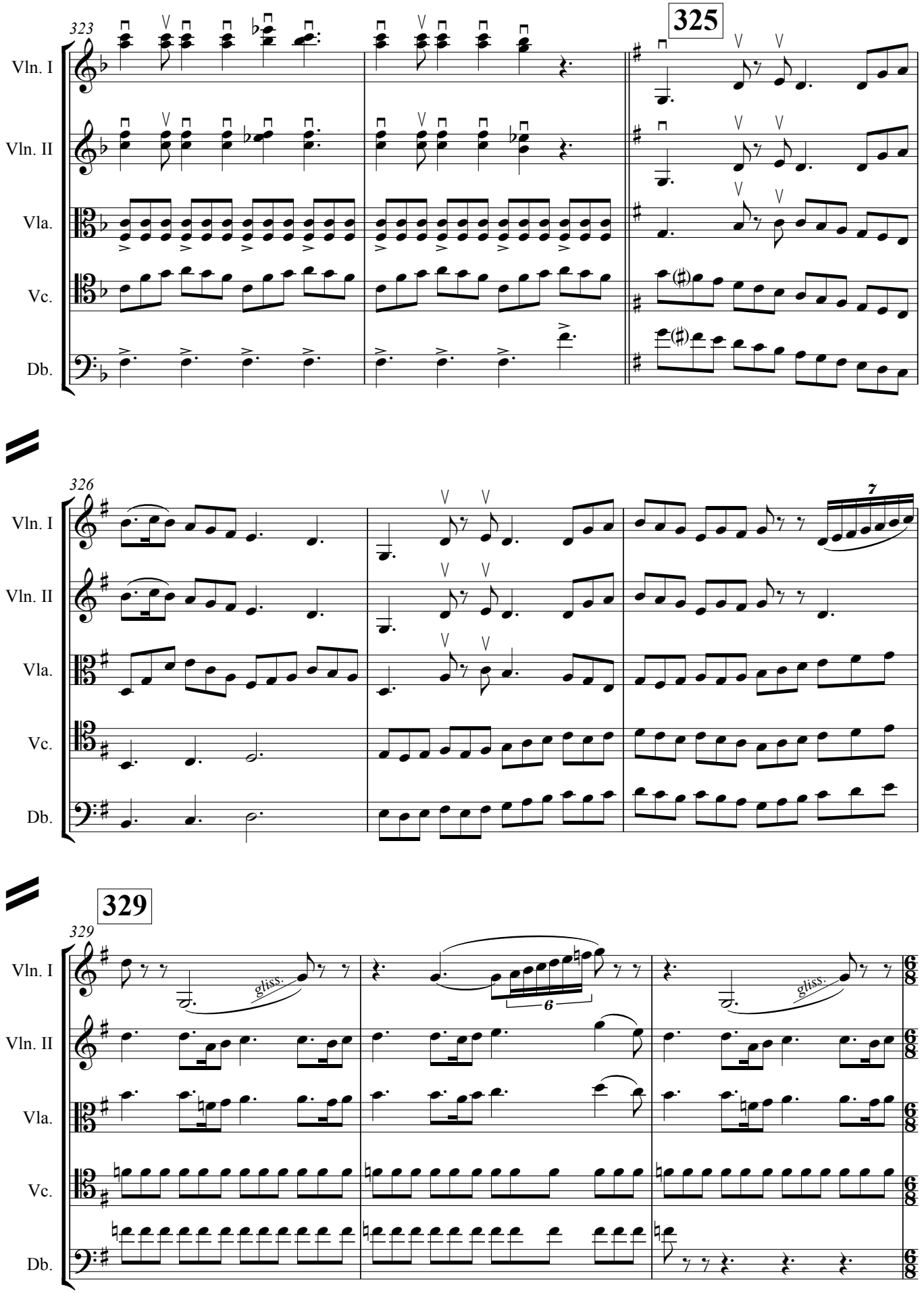
Appendix 2: Tiramisu



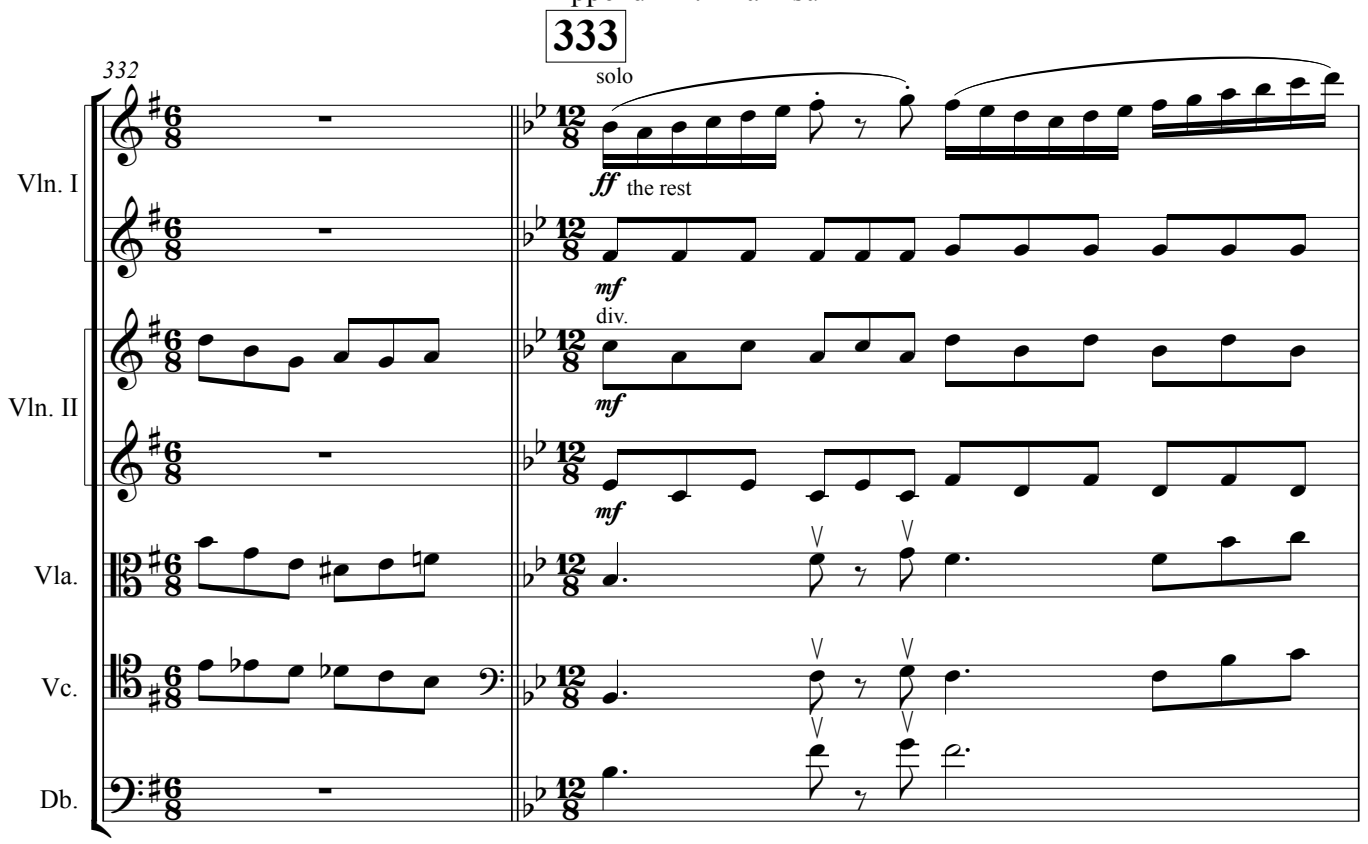
Appendix 2: Tiramisu

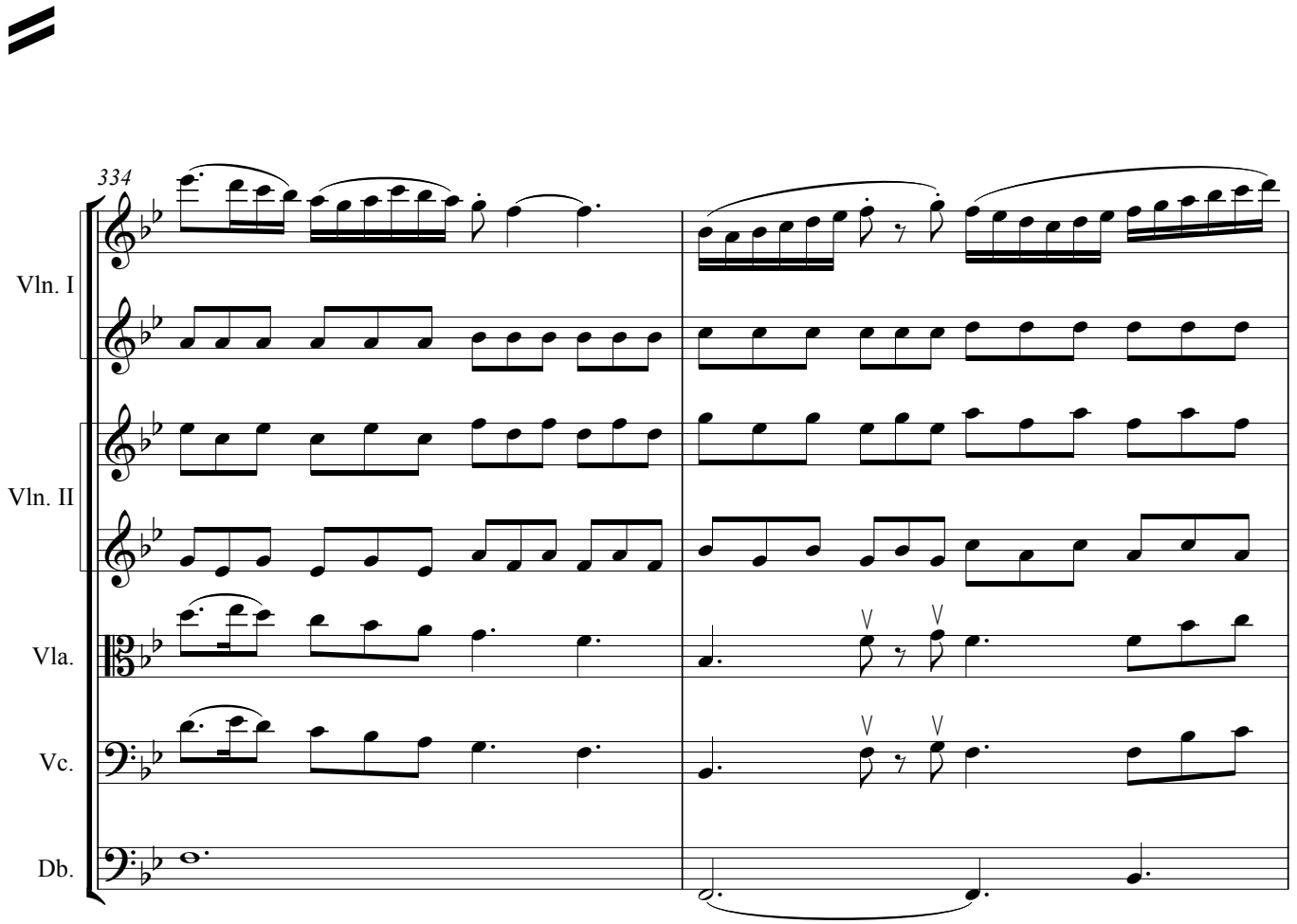


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

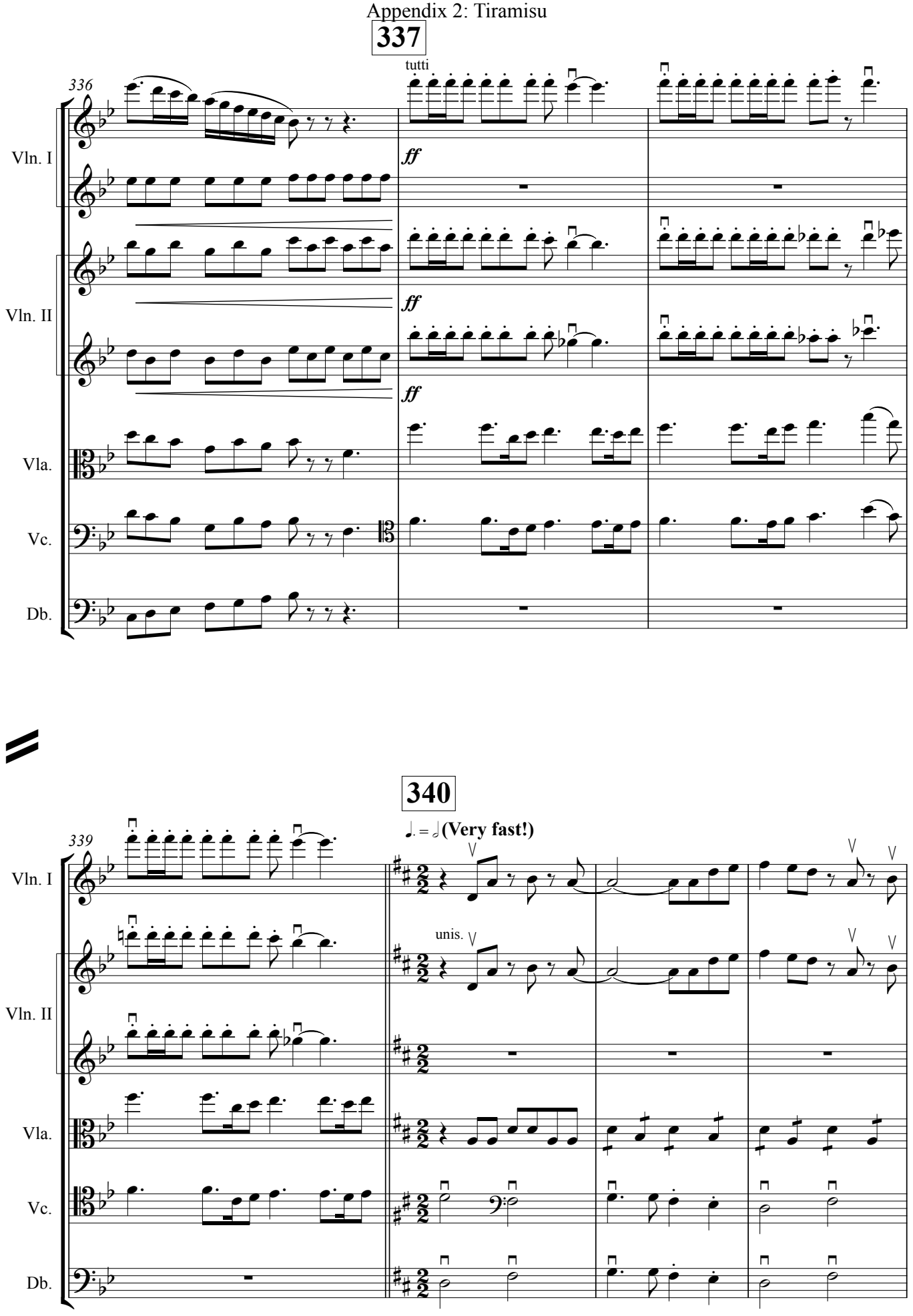


Appendix 2: Tiramisu

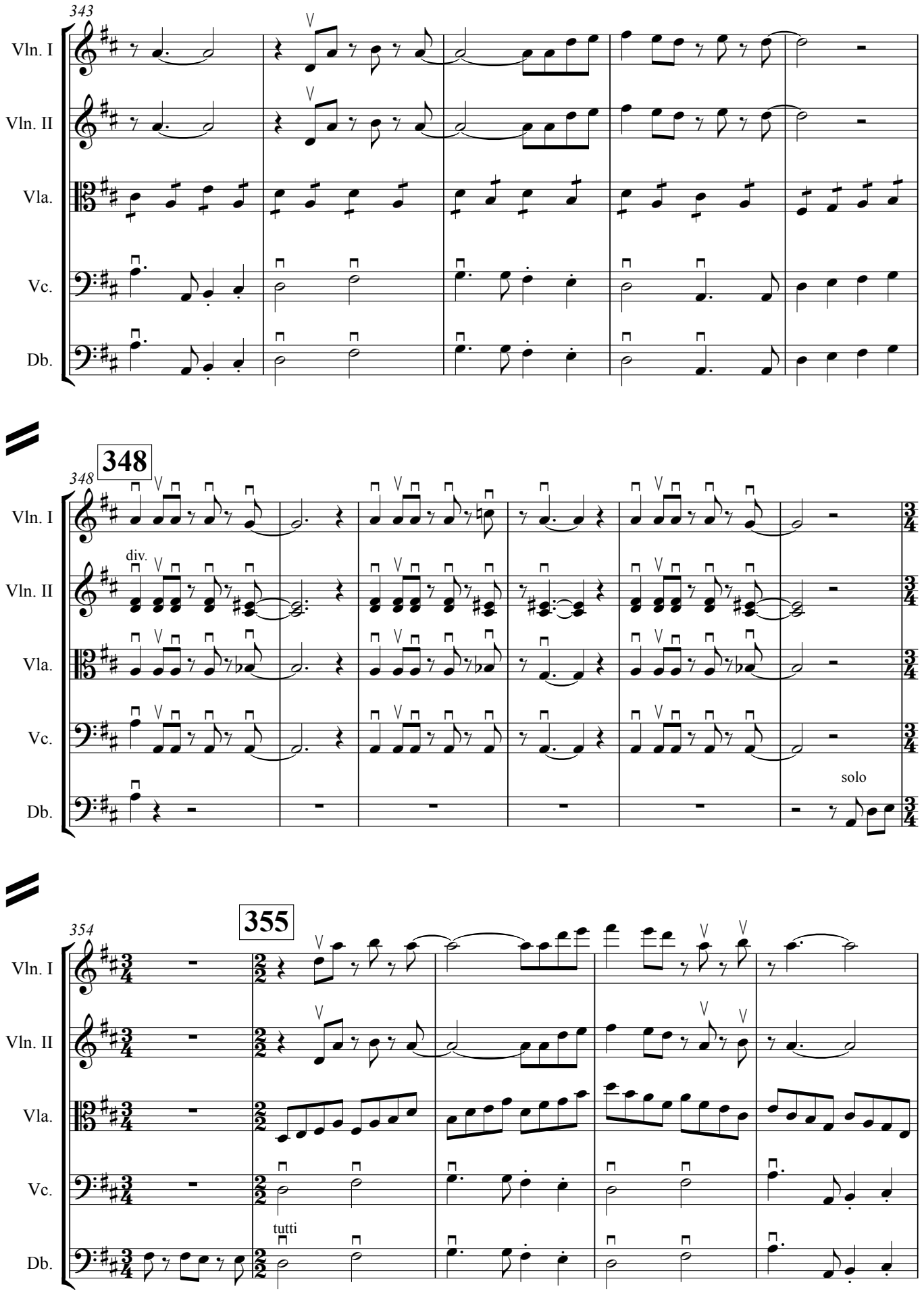




Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu



Appendix 2: Tiramisu